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HEART-BREAK;
THE TRIALS OF LITERARY LIFE,
OR
RECOLLECTIONS OF
CHRISTOPHER NORTH.

1859.



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HEART-BREAK.

CHAPTER I.

IT was towards the close of a cold, damp, foggy November day in 18—, as the hesitating mizzle of a dreary sunset now declared itself in a heavy rain, and as the wind veered from an uncertain bleakness to the piercing certainty of due east—that a young man and a younger girl, who looked pale and seemed to be his wife, came to settle in M——, then an inconsiderable town on the western coast of England.

Tired and hungry they stop before the cheering sign of a little inn, at the outskirts of the town; and are told that there are yet two "good miles" between them and their destination. Two miles more! and they had walked on, as they did now, from break of day through the mizzle and November cold. The man's heart is sinking within him; but the wife, measuring miles by inches—thinks of her troth, "for better or for worse," and points to the cheering sign—the Rising Sun—of the little inn, gladdening him on with her wife's smile. *She* saw through the present

twilight of hopes crushed, to the daybreak of hopes renewed. "If mine is to console—yours is to endure," seemed the purport of that smile. And so he read it, too.

To M—— they came alone, for they had shocked and forfeited their "best friends;" and so complete was the loss that no one much cared whether they lived or whether they died. The forfeited friends would not even "pray" for the wanderers. "God help them," said one—a political economist and a social economist, who happened to be the man's uncle; a gentleman of considerable firmness of character, and firmness of fortune, as he lent them one pound one, and took an I.O.U.

They had just married on nothing. The "firm" uncle's warrant for cutting his kin—a clear offence beyond the pale of pardon—married on nothing! "Great God," said the paternal parent of the bride, in showing her the door himself without his blessing, "What has been my crime? correct me, but in mercy!" Married on nothing! with the great, bleak world before them; nothing *except* those first fresh hopes, that unpolluted sympathy which have so strange a hold in the hearts of the young, and Heaven be praised that it is so—Social Economists, notwithstanding! And those who would crush, and blight them, cold calculators all! A special hearing is reserved for thee. What—if the hearts thou hast severed rise up in judgment—*then*? Thou who hast turned thy flesh and blood into the streets, for fear that the discarded and thyself should ever meet.

Fret not thyself, "firm" man! there is a gulf between. Hereafter will another edict follow up thy ban.

They were very happy, and had just twenty pounds, to say nothing of that one secret of happiness, the value of which they well knew. "They took no thought for the morrow." But I don't think they had a care; why should they? Ralph *loved* that sweet girl with the pale face—pale only because his wore care—and soft blue eyes, who had left plenty and a *home* to warm a hearth for him. And she never murmured when her prudent father, with a bitter (a "city man's") sneer spurned, and told her "that boys and girls did not marry in his time for love." But Ruth was wayward, and what was worse as the attorney-at-law papa said, "she was twenty-one." And she loved Ralph as a broken heart only can. So they were married for no other reason than love; and the bleak world was their only home, and all their friends were quite gone, and the twenty pounds very nearly, when this rash young couple came to M——, as we have seen them, in the cold, and the damp, and the fog.

There was a great house in M——, somewhere about its meridian then; I am writing history now. It was the only really great house in the town; and astonishing things were said, and whispered too, about its "credit," all along the western coast of England.

Messrs. Grasp, Overreach, and Co.,* had "pre-

* The names only are fictitious.

mises" at M——, and "premises" at Oporto. Abel Grasp for many years had sat for M—— in Parliament; he was a little man of the "highest honour," and the greatest integrity, inclining perhaps a trifle to increasing grossness, and "earnest Liberalism." Twice was he mayor, and once did the Corporation present his wife with a silver cradle. The memory of Abel Grasp is referred to on a stone without the town, and honourably preserved on vellum in the Town-hall.

At the time in question, Grasp, Overreach, and Co., were great men in the wine trade; their reputation for port was the only thing that could at all compare with their reputation for "integrity." One, it was said amongst "authorities," was as old as the other. M—— was beholden to Abel Grasp. The great man was coaxed out of three "sittings" in business hours. An R.A. was consulted, and the local patriot "handed down" full length to posterity in the favourite attitude of the devoted senator apostrophising a whig premier as "my noble friend."

They were "thorough men of business," as the *County Chronicle* said when Abel Grasp died suddenly and left a hundred and fifty thousand pounds to carry on the "concern," and "five pounds five" to the "Female Penitentiary." None in M——, had ever actually seen the "Co." Grasp and Overreach were known by the privileged in the flesh. They had a large and sumptuous family pew in the parish church where everybody saw them once a week. They held the plate for charities, and inter-

changed smiles with the lord of the manor. Indeed, Abel Grasp was a local benefactor. His "benefactions" were immense. Twice was he publicly thanked by the vestry, and his letter of thanks were ordered to be entered upon the "journals" of that select body; and the climax, dilating upon the luxury of a "satisfied conscience," was ordered to be read at the Sunday schools.

He kept a gentleman to "do" his charities because, of course, the claims upon his time were such that he had no time to see the poor. And when he did die, the parish, which was so justly proud, and made so much of him, went all the way to Doctors' Commons, and paid enormously to get a "faculty" to open a great vault of his great grandfathers.

"So like him," said the parish, as they read the epitaph, and so it was; for in his unemployed moments Abel Grasp had written it himself.

The "Co." some people did say, was the old man with the bald shiny head—always scrupulously clean with early sorrows, others said—who worked nine hours always and three on Christmas day, for just one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

Grasp, Overreach, and Co. were doing an immense business when Ralph Vernon and his young wife came alone to M—— in that due east wind, and the mizzle and the fog. After all Ralph was, as times went, a lucky man. It is true, too true, that he had only five available pounds in the whole world, and not a friend but the pale-faced clinging thing who lived and walked beside him. But then he had no

"enduring" friends. None in about a month's time from that day to wish him "a merry Christmas and a happy new year." And who *loved* Abel Grasp in that devotedly adoring town of M——? The senator was "*respected*," not "*loved*." "*Respected*" at a distance too, for he lived in a "sphere" by himself alone. So I tell you Ralph was privileged. And he carried—yes, that rash young man actually carried—in the pocket of his coat, a letter of introduction to Abel Grasp, Esq., senior partner of the firm of Grasp, Overreach, and Co.

"Won't it be nice, dear Ralph," said Ruth Vernon, the morning after I met them, hopeful, trusting, yet tired, outside the Rising Sun. "Won't it be nice when we get comfortably settled? I am sure Messrs. Grasp and Overreach will give you *quite* a hundred and fifty pounds a year. I quite love them already. Mr. Grasp, you know, is *such* a liberal man. And then, when you come home, as of course you will at five o'clock, what long evenings we shall have together, with always something nice for your supper. And then, you know, *if* we should be able to *save and get rich*, perhaps papa would forgive us, but you don't say anything, *dear, dear* Ralph."

"To get rich—to save money!" Ruth Vernon knew her much-respected father well, and the one road to that heart of stone!—honoured parent, I beg pardon—gold!

"Bless you, my own Ruth," said her husband, kissing that pale face which looked so fond. "I

don't know how it is, Ruth, but you always make me feel quite happy. God bless you, darling; I am going to Messrs. Grasp, Overreach, and Co. now."

"Wait a minute, Ralph: there, now you will do. I just remembered that glove wanted a button," said she, brushing his hat and coat, "you do look *so* nice this morning, *dear, dear* Ralph. I am sure they must give you a hundred and fifty pounds a year at least; and I am sure you are worth a great deal more."

"I hope *they* will think so," said Ralph, quietly, and he kissed the lips of that dowerless treasure, who was not pale now, because she hoped and believed and thought every one must love *him*.

Of course, Ralph Vernon had no difficulty in finding the "house" of Messrs. Grasp, Overreach, and Co. It would have been passing strange if he had. Once, indeed, at starting, he did ask the way, but as the answer he got was, "Why, it's the only house fit to be called a house in the place," he did not ask again.

It was in truth a great "house," and it stood just in front of the sea. When Ralph got there, of course he was kept waiting. "A person wants Mr. Grasp," said the porter to the chief clerk, and the "person" was desired to wait. It was necessary, of course, in such a "house," to preserve the proper distinction between a "gentleman who called on business" and a "person" who was not anxious to communicate his business. Grasp, Overreach, and Co. were "tho-

rough men of business," always engaged, and they always did keep people waiting—they did such a large trade.

"Mine is private business," said Ralph, timidly, after waiting two hours in a thorough draft, with the thermometer just at freezing—as it was very proper he should—to one of six clerks, who seemed wonderfully busy.

There was no answer—no notice—only the noise of the six pens. So Ralph took courage and said it again.

"Private business—oh, indeed!" said one; "call again; Mr. Grasp does private business at three o'clock. What name shall I say?"

"He will not know it," said Ralph, cold and disheartened. "I will call again at three."

And when Ralph Vernon did call at three, the six clerks were all in the same place, and there was just the same noise of the same six pens.

Time passed on, and four o'clock came; and then a little man with a bald head, rattling some gold in his trowsers' pocket, sauntered slowly into the office, with a glass of very old port in the hand that was not engaged with the gold.

And the importance and position of that little old man in that great house was obvious when, on his appearance, all the six clerks bent their heads infinitely lower accordingly.

And no wonder either. That little man with the bald head, who was playing with sovereigns and drinking the oldest port, was he whose memory lives on vellum on the walls of M——'s Town-hall; was he

who was coaxed out of three sittings in business hours, was Abel Grasp, late M.P., and now senior partner of the firm of Grasp, Overreach, and Co.

Presently one of the six clerks looked up and said, deferentially, "Private business."

Abel Grasp turned blandly to the "private business," with exactly the same air and dignity with which it had once been his wont to address the House when in Committee, and which the R.A. had managed so signally to reproduce and perpetuate on canvas. Now, if Grasp was pre-eminently any one thing, he was a respecter of persons, so he looked hard at Ralph—the air by which he awed committees was dissolved, as though he were disgusted at the "effect" he had thrown away, and addressed expectant Ralph as it was said he did the Board of Guardians.

"Well, young man, what can we do for you?" Grasp never did forget the dignified plurality.

Ralph, thus addressed, very humbly took out the letter which Ruth, long before he had been awake, had wrapped so carefully in the whitest paper. And whilst Grasp read it, he still sipped the ancient wine, and still kept his left hand in the trowsers' pocket, amongst the gold which was there.

"Reeves!"

"Yes, sir," said Reeves, the little man who had one hundred and fifty pounds a-year for working nine hours always and three on Christmas day, slipping adroitly from his high stool.

"This *person* wants work—wants something to do. Is there anything?"

"Allbone's place is vacant, sir; he left yesterday, to better himself."

"Better himself, indeed! ungrateful fool! that man's folly may be your opportunity. What's the salary, Reeves?"

"Forty pounds a-year, sir; raised from thirty-five."

"Ah! to be sure. I remember, when bread rose. I am too generous; it has been my ruin. Hours?"

"Hours, sir? eight to eight."

"What sort of a hand do you write, young man? Come, give us a specimen. Ah! a little bit shaky. Forty pounds a-year, sir, is a great deal—a very great deal, sir, when the hand shakes. You are a lucky man—a d——d lucky man, with advantages and friends I never enjoyed. Why, when I was your age, egad! I had nothing; and it's the best way, too; it teaches young men to push—yes, sir, *push*. I pushed." And Abel Grasp rattled the sovereigns, perhaps to show how pushing answered.

"And am I to understand, sir, said Ralph, who knew not how largely Grasp traded on a liberal name, "that forty pounds a-year is *all* I am to have?"

"All!" repeated Grasp, expectorating; "all! Why, that's a clear ten pounds a-quarter. Light work, too—eight to eight. A mere nothing. It's a Godsend—a positive Godsend—to a man whose hand shakes."

"I have a wife, sir," said Ralph, more humbly still, but without cringing.

"More fool you, sir; young men shouldn't marry.

Marriage was made for the rich. *I* never married: but you may thank God you've come to me. You won't starve now, think of that. Forty pounds a-year, sir. Overreach would say, 'it's too much; it's just like you, Grasp.' It's a Godsend. Suppose you begin to-day? Young man, you're in the hands of the *All Merciful*." And Grasp said the last two words in his best churchwarden tone.

Twenty-five years after that day, Abel Grasp was dead. It was eminently satisfactory to M—— to know that so good a citizen had died "resigned." He had always, in his most sanguine moments, hinted that one hundred and fifty thousand would give him peace at the last. It is hardly to be wondered, therefore, that the calm mind of so firm a man should overflow with resignation, as it did, according to the solemn declaration of his bereaved partner.

But Overreach was dead, too. There was still a "Co.," though the names were all changed. It was "Vernon and Co." now. What freaks time does play! Ralph Vernon was the sole partner in that great "house" by the sea. He *had* worked from eight to eight, and he rose step by step; and when Reeves died Ralph was "promoted" to the vacant stool, and had one hundred and fifty pounds a-year for working nine hours always, and three on Christmas day.

And Abel Grasp, on his death-bed, took Ralph Vernon into partnership!

Ralph and his wife Ruth, in course of time, had

two children—three were born to them, but one died. Charles was the first-born, a thinking boy, who gave a world of trouble, but a dunce, as the discriminating parents said. He came just one month before he was expected, a fact which, perhaps, united the prejudices of papa and mamma. And, somehow, he always did things that were not expected ever after. It was feared he would grow up like his grandfather, who had a great nose, and was a great thinker. Sybil was two years younger. Beautiful Sybil! why was your sister's grave not yours? Why did you not die young, too?

CHAPTER II.

It was twenty-five years as near as might be since the young man, with his young wife, stopped before the Rising Sun, two "good miles" to M—— before them still—in the cold, and the damp, and the fog—and Charles Vernon would be of age to-morrow.

It was almost Christmas, but not quite, though not like Christmas time at all. And as young Vernon, the "*thinking man*," sat full of thought in his father's office that afternoon, Ralph, with a smile as grim as it was unnatural, stepped from his own room just as Abel Grasp had twenty-five years before.

Was it possible that the fourth of a century could work *that* change? See! the clutch of the hands that has become habitual! See! the hard lines on the pinched face of "quite the man of business!" Hear the chuckle when he talks of his trade! Ralph Vernon was "deeply respected." He was the making of the town, as Grasp was; he traded on a liberal *name*, as Grasp had. They were both "worthy men," Christians who paid their way. There were few who

saw through the mock sanctity, and there were none who dared to say so if they did.

At fifty, Abel Grasp had caught the small-pox ; it attacked his face malignantly. The disfigured man was marked to his grave. The worthy citizen, who had never been wholly insensible to the charms of the sex, and was supposed to have a pressing interest in the female penitentiary, cursed and swore by turn when he first saw the unlovely man he was. But partner Vernon caught it too; the same as he had Grasp's "business-like habits." And the old man chuckled in hideous ecstasy at partner Vernon's fate.

Aye, Ralph, you are not now what you were twenty-five years ago. Time has changed you wonderfully! You have had the "distemper" badly, and although you may be warranted over it, in your constitution it lurks and lingers still. Rescued from "want," you grasped at "plenty." You are a man of the world now, and some people say a hard one.

"Charles, my boy," said Ralph, blandly, "I want to speak to you."

And Charles, thus addressed, followed his father into the little room where Abel once used to sit, and where a life-like portrait of that gentleman, in his second mayoralty, hung commandingly over the little fire-place. Ralph Vernon, as it has been said, had a smile upon his face—and that was odd too, for Ralph seldom smiled in business hours—and he sate upon an old stool, an hereditary possession in the "concern." Generations had been made men of business at its

top, and one of Ralph's legs swung to and fro, and with one of his hands he tossed, nervously, a bunch of keys.

"Charles, my boy, twenty-one years ago, to-morrow, you came into the world before we were half ready for you; and, as a steady boy generally makes a steady man, I hope great things from you." Ralph paused to see the effect of his splendid axiom, and then continued: "You have worked well at the business, and it's a fine trade too. There's no credit like mine all along this coast. But, Charles, my boy, what are you always *thinking* about? Your mother says you are always in thought. Young men should take things for granted; they shouldn't *think*; it unsettles their minds, it unfits them for *business*, and that's the very devil. But I'm not so young as I was; and, Charles, my boy, here, give us your hand. *I mean to take you into partnership to-morrow.* There, there, now; don't say a word to your old father; and yet I'm not fifty. Old! why, I'm in my prime." And Ralph Vernon tried to look young, but only succeeded in looking old.

"My dear father——"

"Oh! yes, of course, thanks," said the delighted parent, indulging in some undignified movements of his person, which must have had some effect upon the dust of Abel Grasp. "I know all about it. There, don't say another word."

"But, my dear father——"

"There, now, don't say another word. Bless the boy, if he isn't *thinking* now. I am sure young men

didn't *think* in my days ; it's the ruin of business when they do. Go, go, Charles, and tell your mother, and Sybil."

Charles Vernon's face was very pale ; he knew his father to be terrible in his wrath. His education had unsettled and unfitted him for trade. His mind, naturally large and ambitious, was richly stored ; and at that age when hopes are more buoyant and beat higher than, perhaps, we ever feel them after, he conceived a dislike for his father's following, which amounted to a positive loathing. He had heard of the world's prizes even at M——. He *was* a thinking boy. Charles Vernon's dearest ambition was *to write*, to contribute to the literature of the world, to be a writer whom men unborn might rapturously read ; and he had early cultivated the taste with encouraging success. The lucubrations of "C. V." were often the best things in the county paper. But he knew too well his father's opinions on that head, and dreaded in his heart that father's anger. Ralph Vernon was no exception. The future of genius is too often crushed by the narrowing influence of that power which shudders when it feels it is the parent of a mind. The fool's child must not be pensive ; better far the offspring should never reach maturity, and its name a mellow fame. Were it otherwise, there might be fewer martyrs to *thought* in our nurseries.

"My dear father," said Charles, his lips quivering, his voice faltering, "I thank you ;—God only knows how much ; but—but—it cannot, cannot be."

"Cannot! and why not, I should like to know? Who dares to say cannot to *me*?"

"Yes, father, I repeat it cannot be," said Charles, without the loss of an atom of dignity. "I would rather starve than enter trade."

"Trade! Oh, God! Vernon and Co.—*trade*! D—n it! I like that. The son of Ralph Vernon above trade, and not ashamed to confess it. But I might have expected it: this comes of *thinking*."

"It's all nonsense, boy, d——d nonsense," continued Ralph, after a short pause. A pretty go this, young men telling their fathers they hate business. What *business* have young men to think for themselves? It's rebellion—positive rebellion! You've got too much brains, let me tell you, sir, for your station. It's your curse. Stick to business, sir; stick to business. Oh, God! the boy's *thinking* now. I say, stick to business; it's the only way on earth to heaven."

If Ralph Vernon commenced by swearing, he always ended by being religious. If Ralph Vernon, moreover, was right, and his be the proper medium, never was man on earth nearer heaven than the father of the thinking boy.

"I—I—wish it. Do you hear, sir? Wish it. I—I—*command*."

"Father," said Charles, respectfully—for he obeyed the first commandment with promise—"I have never disobeyed you yet. Would you have me follow what I hate?"

"Oh, God! I'm dreaming. Ha! ha! Capital joke, Charles. You always had a wit of your own, and it's d——d spruce to-day. Capital joke. Ha! ha! sweetly funny! There's the deed. It's Vernon and Son after to-morrow."

"My dear father, do believe me, I never was more in earnest in my life than when I tell you I do not hate trade for itself, but that I feel trade is not suited to me, and that this cannot——"

"Not another word. Don't talk to me, boy. You presume. It comes of thinking; every d——d thing comes of that. The son of the first man of business in this town—the only man of business," said Ralph, drawing himself up, and showing to advantage every inch of five feet five, "telling his father trade is not suited to him. Trade! Don't sneer, sir; I tell you you *are* sneering. Trade made this town. But it all comes of thinking; what has trade to do with thought—eh, sir? Can you tell your father that, sir? What has trade to do with *thought*? Perhaps you can answer *that*?"

"But, father——"

"Don't interrupt me, sir. Don't answer. You're undutiful; d——d undutiful. I don't often swear, but you're enough to make a saint take to the bad habit. You'll break your father's heart. Don't *father* me, sir. I'll disinherit you, by G—. And pray, sir, what *will* you do?"

"*Write, father; I wish to write for my living.*"

"Write! Oh, God! the boy's mad! Write! *Starve, starve, beg, rot*,—that's what you mean.

People always starve who write. Your grandfather said he'd write, but he didn't; he starved; and if it hadn't been for his friends, the parish must have buried him. He was a d——d great thinker, and people have said you're like him. He came to beg his bread; and I thank God he didn't come to the gallows. You'll break my heart, sir—I, who have been so proud of you. What has your mother done that she should have borne you? I, who hoped to have seen you settled and respected, well married to a rich girl—I—oh, God! I'm getting angry!"

"Father," said Charles, the colour mounting to his cheeks, "father, I *will* speak!"

And calmly, as was his nature, the *thinking* son of Ralph Vernon spoke:

"You would not see me thus degraded—so disgraced by such a marriage. No, no; recall the words you spoke so hastily. I have made up my mind—I will write for my living. I have, whatever the present consequences of such an avowal may be, a weakness—so the world would call it—for believing that love was never yet for sale. Your uncommonly clever city parvenu, with his nice distinctions between honour and trade, who fancies that with the thong of his mercantile whip he can flog all creation at pleasure, is at perfect liberty to sell you his daughter, and you may marry her, and all her vulgarity, which is often a by no means small part of the bargain; but although your city friends may hiccup forth a shameless bravo over your champagne, and although, moreover, the 'transaction,' in a monetary sense, may afford the

best proof of its being business-like, by raining £ s. d., nature, dear father—believe me as you like—is not one atom or one whit the less outraged. Love in its purity ignored, the very marriage a mockery, *loathsome* in itself, and unhallowed before God!”

Ralph Vernon’s lips quivered; his words of mocking derision were as a hideous laugh; and his grey eyes were full of the bitterest scorn as he looked so hard at the son who had never spoken as he did that day. As soon as his impotent rage was somewhat spent, he said—not with his churchwarden smile—“Have you *quite* done, sir? Quite done? You’d better be an actor, a stage-player, or get into Parliament, or some such folly. When a man takes to thinking or writing, he never stops. Don’t stay at writing: you’re a great talker, sir! Have you quite made up your mind? Have you resolved to *think*, to *beg*, to *write*, to *rot*, to *starve*? Remember, boy, if you do leave me on any such a d——d freak, if you will write, I disinherit—I *disown* you!”

“Father, for *writing*? No, no, not *disown*——”

“Disown! Yes, sir. I believe I did say disown. I wonder I’m not angry. It’s a great trial; but I seldom lose my temper. Get out of my sight, sir! Don’t let me see you again. You’ll come to beg—to beg bread of me. Ha! ha! and beg you may. See if thought, if writing, will keep you out of the workhouse. *Write!* Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! thinking! you’ll have plenty of time, sir, when you come to the parish. That’s a fine time for writing and

thought. Why don't you go, sir? Why do you stand staring there? Get out of my sight. Good Lord! good Lord!"

* * * * *

Three days after that Charles Vernon, for the last time, crossed the threshold of his stern father's home. A dark mist rolled in shore over the quiet sea, and M—— itself looked grey and still. It was very early, and hardly light, when the coach stopped outside the Rising Sun, and a young man—strangely like to one who stopped before that cheering sign just five and twenty years before—with fair hair, took his seat outside for London. Where the father once stood with "two good miles" before him, and where the mother whispered "*hope*," stood the calm figure of the disowned son. And care was marked in the pale face. It looked perished, and, I think, hungry too; and Charles Vernon owed this already to literature and thought. And he is not alone. It was a world of subtle phrases and "friendly" fraud to which he was going; but he, forgetting the ban that hurled him from his home, still believed in something higher. And see! a sweet girl stands there beside him, bidding him hope and trust, and pointing to the morning star above him there. And there were tears in the comforter's eyes then. She was the outcast's sister; she was Sybil; and the cold wind, due east, blew through and through her; but she held up bravely till the jolly guard seized his horn, and told M—— that his coach was going; then she clung to him whose only crime was *thought*; but those four greys were

not to be stopped for tears. The last kiss, the last "God bless you!" and yet they linger still. See! the coach rising that far steep hill. For it was all over now. And when it was out of sight, the soft, sad eyes watched where it had last been. Sybil watched through the blinding tears, but there was only mist—the mist as it came from the sea. Sybil looked again, but it was darker still—*that* was perhaps despair.

And it was cold, and damp, and foggy, as Charles Vernon was hurried swiftly by that clipping team through the thick morning air. But, as night came to the homeless man, darker grew the clouds which blackened the young hopes of the disinherited and the disowned!

CHAPTER III.

THERE was a fog—a London fog—when the coach stopped in Holborn. It was not like the mist which rolled in from the sea at M——. Not a bit. And as it was raw cold, and not quite light, Charles Vernon buttoned up his great-coat tighter still. Six o'clock had just struck, and everything looked grey—a dull December grey.

“Is this London?” asked Charles of the coachman—a communicative man, who sat beside him—when the coach stopped.

“Lunnun, yes—sure-*ly* this 'ere is the great Metropolis. That's what it's called in books, I've 'eard tell. It's a rum place, sir; 'specially if you aint seen it afore; 'specially if you don't know what's what. Ah! you won't believe it, but I knowed this 'ere town when there wornt no Age of Progress. Blowed if they don't talk of running bilers, which they call hingins or sumut like it, all the blessed way twixt 'ere and M——, instead of this 'ere coach. What's to become of me, ses I—that's what I want to know;

what's to become of these 'ere four slap-ups? Drive a 'ackney—No, ses I, not if I knows it."

The coachman here jumped down, and soon forgot his indignation over a glass "as stiff," he declared, "as they used to was when the road *was* the road and there were no bilers."

Jehu was quite right. London is a strange puzzle, especially when you "don't know it." Charles Vernon stood on the pavement, the greasy pavement, looking about him in the thick brown fog; and he didn't know where to go. The streets were very empty, and so was the coach too now. Some of the "insides" had hailed cabs and gone home, and others stayed at the old inn where the coach stopped; and some were met by glad faces—glad faces in that fog—and drove off in their own carriages, for they were well to do, and left Vernon alone.

Home! and he shuddered, that wayward man, when he heard that order to drive *home*, and asked for Cheapside.

Cheapside—busy, bustling Cheapside! Charles had heard of that when he was quite a boy; but no one bustled, no one was busy then. Milk-street! that's where he was going. At half-past six he reached there, sleepy and cold. Nobody seemed to stir, and the fog was thicker still. And he walked up Cheapside, and down it too, trying to get warm, and watched the time as well as he could from the great clock of Bow Church.

Charles Vernon was just worth fifty pounds as he stood at the corner of Milk-street that grey December

morning. It was partly what he had saved, and partly what Sybil had given him—what Sybil had slipped into his cold hand when the coach stopped at M——, and she had insisted in her own fond way, when she had said, “God bless you;” and Sybil had had her own way. And now Vernon was in London alone. He was very cold, but there was something colder still. A dog licked his hand as he looked at the great clock of Bow Church just as it was eight, and he was very hungry. And the dog it shivered and seemed afraid; and it looked hungry and cold too as it crouched at Charles’s feet; and how it shook the brown fog from its rough coat, and still looked cold, and right into Charles’s pale face. He took that dog. He was quite the victim of feeling; he had always had so much heart, it quite stood in his way. So the chilled man pitied the dog, pitied the lean beast that was as homeless as he, and called it Pauper from that day.

There are some men who are born fools, who are fools when the sun shines, and fools in a fog. Keeping themselves and a dog, too, upon fifty pounds a year!

Charles Vernón walked up Milk-street, and stopped at a little house where a dirty card, in a dirty window, told him there were lodgings to let. He only wanted one room; that was a big enough home for him.

No one came for a long time, and then a woman opened the door.

“Ten shillings a week’s what we ask; coals extra.

There ain't no children, and it tain't likely there will be; but we caan't 'ave no dogs."

Charles looked at Pauper, and Pauper looked at him; and Charles saw, through the brown fog, every bone of what that hard woman called "no end of a brute." And Pauper's future—was it in doubt? Not for a moment then. The "brute" was strangely eloquent. That man's purse was light. Fifty pounds in all looks like starvation in expectancy. The thin dog wagged his thin tail, heavily; and Vernon said, politely, "good morning" to the hard woman, who was London bred.

"That boy's feelings would lead him into folly; he had so much of them," as his father said.

Sagaciously prophetic Ralph Vernon, see—if thou can'st, through the brown fog—thy first-born's "folly" has begun, as he speaks to a starving dog, and kindly bids him come!

"Poor fellow—poor Pauper!"

And that man, and that dog, what a love was theirs to be!

Crossing over to the other side, Vernon stopped before a small house, which looked much cleaner than the last. The woman was clean, too, with a kind face, where pity was written; and Vernon liked her at sight.

"Seven shillings a week, sir; but I don't know if my husband will mind the dog. Step in, sir, you look cold, and I will ask him."

Her husband was a hard man; "highly respected,"

but hard. He was drunk that morning when he said "Yes."

Charles Vernon was "at home." Home! It's a fact; in one room on the third floor in Milk-street, Cheapside! His dog shared his breakfast; that was not much, but perhaps he had the larger half. And then Vernon, with days, and weeks, and months, and years before him, in that little room, with no one to ask questions—THOUGHT. Thought and wondered what to do. And a great future was shadowed forth in his feverish mind then. He said so to me years after.

"What to do?" and in London for the first time. There is ample choice for the fancy. It may soar or it may grovel—it will find work. But things are often hard to get, with harder words in the getting.

Yes, Jehu of the coach from M——! London is a wonderful place; where men starve because they are proud—too proud to beg, and don't like relieving officers; where men steal and are known to the police, but never did find honesty at all the best policy.

Write! Yes, Charles Vernon had come to London to write; to write for the London Tory press. And when he began the first sheet, as the pen touched the paper, how his cold hand trembled; and looking up, he saw his own pale face in the little glass, and remembered he was like his great-great-grandfather, who had written and starved.

Write! Yes, that wayward man, who hated trade,

did write; and he never went out for six weeks, except to slip what he had written into an editor's box; and he spoke to no one, and no one spoke to him, except that woman with the kind face, where pity was written too. And then he had only forty pounds.

Vernon was soon in high favour with that woman. She had been a mother once, years ago, and was childless now. When she saw Vernon's face, which was so pale, she thought of the son she had lost, and who had looked once just as Vernon did then. Perhaps the dead boy once did; but mothers cling to the memory, and see in a thousand forms the image of the darling they have lost and loved.

Vernon's work was nearly done. Hitherto he had written for nothing; he would now write for pay. One morning he could not write; not a thought would come. He looked wild as he sat in the little third-floor room that day, and his eyes flashed unnaturally. He pressed his hand upon his brain, and felt a hot pain there.

"Do go out for a little walk, sir, if it's only down Cheapside. You'll make yourself ill—I know you will; you want air, take my word for it."

Charles Vernon took the advice which the pitying woman kindly meant. He did walk up and down Cheapside, and went out always afterwards.

Twice a week he heard from Sybil, and Sybil's were long letters; such bits of real nature, for she had never been to school. Those letters, those bits of nature, were all that ever came to Charles Vernon,

as he sat alone in Milk-street, Cheapside, to tell him he was loved. But he began to get impatient, for his first leader had been before one of the greatest Tory editors* in the city of London for nearly three weeks, and it had never yet appeared.

Sybil, when she wrote, was very sanguine—she always was to Charles—and said, “I daresay the editor is making up his mind whether it’s to be ten pounds or more.” And her letters seemed to him like the glad messages of angels, and Vernon hoped on.

He wrote again ; this time an answer came ; and it was so civil, and it was this which Charles read :—

“The editor of the — presents his compliments to Mr. Vernon, and returns him his article, which has received the editor’s best attention. Mr. Vernon has asked at the editor’s hands a frank opinion. He does not think writing to be Mr. Vernon’s forte. The article before the editor is too *high toned, and too much in earnest* : if, on that ground only, he does not think it would suit a general public. It pains the editor at all times to discourage, but he will be happy to explain his further objections if, and when, Mr. Vernon will favour him with a call. The article, which he regrets to decline, is herein enclosed.†

“To Charles Vernon, Esq., Milk-street,
Cheapside.”

Charles Vernon saw nothing very clearly of this

* He has come almost to beg his bread.

† The original, of which this is a copy, is in the writer’s possession.

very civil letter. The spasm, that struck so heavy, he felt it again on his burning brain just where he did before. And that man, did he curse? did he swear? No, Charles Vernon prayed in that little room in Milk-street, Cheapside, where nothing for months had come to cheer him, only hope and Sybil's letters; and strange things he did pray, for his head swam, but his prayer, *that* seemed to go to heaven.

Pauper, the dog, that was once starving and cold, looked at his sad master; and, perhaps, the dumb brute wondered at the face that was so changed. He leaped on the bed just where Vernon kneeled, and licked the clasped hands, the hands that were clasped in agony there. And when Charles Vernon rose there were tears in his eyes, but heaven heard him, for the disinherited *hoped*.

Write! Yes, Charles Vernon wrote on, although "too high toned" for a Tory editor.* It was March now. The London season had just begun, and the wayward's purse was low—three pounds, and that could not last long; and then Vernon would read Sybil's last letter, so cheering and so fond, and look from his little window from his little room in Cheapside, where he knew nobody, and nobody knew him; and above the great tide in Cheapside, which kept ebbing and flowing all day long, full of fools, knaves, and "thorough men of business," he saw the blue sky, and believed in Him, and the sad heart hoped on.

An east wind blew coldly up the street where Charles Vernon lived. It was a fortnight since he

* There was no CONSTITUTIONAL PRESS then.

had heard from Sybil, when, one morning, a carriage stopped before his door—and a splendid carriage it was, too. The footman had powder, and the coachman a wig. He had actually lost his way—he, I mean, who drove that splendid carriage—for never before had that wig come east of Temple Bar.

The carriage stopped. Such a knock had not for years been heard against that little door in Milk-street, Cheapside, and, perhaps, never before at all. A beautiful girl sprang out. She was quite alone, and the footman—he was a London one—looked and wondered. And some “men of business” there were who looked out of the windows of their noble premises, and wondered, too, what that beautiful carriage, and that beautiful girl could possibly want there.

“Is Charles at home?”

The clean woman who answered that knock, and opened the door, was certainly astonished that morning. The splendid carriage stopping before the smallest house in Milk-street, and the lovely girl who asked for her strange, pale lodger as “Charles!”

“Charles, Charles, Miss? A Mr. Vernon lives here?”

“Oh, now,” said she, laughing, “why, it’s my dear brother, my own dear brother, he’s Charles—not Mr. Vernon; and he has told me all about you in his letters.”

“Shall I show you the way, Miss?”

“No, no, thank you; it’s the third floor; I know all about it.” And she ran up the little winding

stairs—those stairs which were so old—and she never stopped till she came to Charles' door.

Did she knock? "Charles, Charles," was all she said—the tears choked the rest.

"Sybil."

And so they met—the brother who had chosen his own hard lot—the sister who had come to soften it. "God is good," said Charles presently; and I think he thanked his Maker. "My own little Sybil, *is* this a dream? Let me look at you, darling, darling Sybil."

"A dream, Charles, I should think not; but what am I crying about, I'm so, so happy. See there, too, Charles, *that* is no dream, is it?" And the woman who had learned to pity, opened the door with a large hamper, heavily laden.

There were only two chairs in the room, and one of them was broken.

"There, I will sit here," said Sybil, as she took her seat at Charles' feet, upon a little stool, burying her beautiful face in her brother's hands. And as her fair hair flowed over Charles' knees, it was a sad, sad sight: for all that it was lovely too.

Oh, the joy that had stolen into that little third-floor room in Milk-street, Cheapside.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a long silence; both were too happy to speak; the sister was the first to break it.

“Well, dear Charles, you have been very patient, and now listen and I will tell you all about it. Papa has come to London—come to London for good. We left yesterday, and he means, he says, to live in Eaton-square, where we are now, Number —. So this morning, the first thing—yes, Charles, the very first thing—I asked him if I might come and see you. At first he was very angry, and said ‘No;’ but I coaxed him, and coaxed him, and at last he gave in. He said he could not resist me; and here I am, dear, *dear* Charles.”

“This *is* news, Sybil; but won’t you take something, darling?” and Charles looked for his purse. It was unfortunate that he did, for there was nothing there.

“Gone all—*ALL* gone. Oh! Sybil, forgive me. I have not a crust, nor a shilling left——”

“If you please, Sir, about that rent, don’t take on so about it; it’s no good to worrit yourself about

it. I'm sure you ain't often happy, and I'm sure I can wait."

"Well, I am sure, that is a dear, good woman," said Sybil; but you mustn't cry, Charles, or you'll make me cry, too. Look here; it's twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds, Sybil?"

"Yes, Charles; papa gave it me on my last birthday; and it's yours—*all* yours."

"No, Sybil, no; it cannot be. I chose my lot, and I can bear it, too, as long as *you* love me."

"Why, Charles, whatever *is* the matter? How strange you *do* look, and how you stare. Oh! speak to me, dear, dear Charles."

"It's nothing, Sybil; nothing, only my head."

"Oh! I see all about it, Charles; only your head, indeed. You are not well, and you've never told me. I shall send the doctor, Charles."

"No, darling, no. See, now, I am better already; mine is not a case for medicine, Sybil."

"Well, now, Charles, if I have not almost forgotten what I came about—such news. *We are going to Edinburgh.*"

"I am sorry you are going so far, dear Sybil; but it is not for long, I hope."

"Sorry, Charles! you mustn't be sorry; you ought to be glad; and shall I tell you why?—because we are going to Edinburgh."

"Well, darling, and what of Edinburgh, that I should be so glad to lose you?"

"Why, don't you know, Charles, Mr. North lives there?"

"Mr. North, Sybil! What Mr. North?"

"*The* Mr. North. Christopher North. Oh, don't you know him? He helps everybody. I quite love him already."

"Love him already—help everybody—really, Sybil!"

"There, now, Charles, give me your papers. The first day—yes, the very first day—we get to Edinburgh, I shall go to Mr. North, and I shall say, '*My* dear brother wrote this.'"

"Well, Sybil, but suppose he won't see you?"

"Suppose, Charles. Why, then, I shall have gone to the wrong Mr. North. Oh! I've been reading all about him lately. *The* Mr. North would never do that. Well, Charles, and then I shall ask him to put it into *Blackwood* if he can—*Blackwood's Magazine*, you know—and I am sure he will. And if you, Charles, had ever heard about Mr. North, you would think so, too. He's not a bit like any man I ever read of."

"I have heard so, Sybil. There will be yet another to pray God bless him if he takes pity on me."

"Pity, Charles, yes; but *he* will not let you *feel* it. Good-bye, my own dear brother. God bless you, dear Charles. Oh, I quite forgot to tell you. Lord L—— called yesterday, last evening; was it not kind to come so soon?"

"Lord L——? indeed, Sybil. I never liked *that* man. God bless you, darling: and He will."

And He did, but not until He took her.

And they were parted. She was gone. And joy

had passed from Milk-street, too. The woman who was kind to Charles thanked the Disinherited's sister as she stepped into the splendid carriage of her rich father. And other eyes there were—a brother's—from that small third floor, which watched it longingly, as it drove down the little street, and rolled into Cheapside.

* * * * *

L——! No; somehow, Vernon never liked that man. L——! the handsome, sparkling, gay. Ralph Vernon once had spent a summer at Oporto. It was Sybil's first season; and she had gone, too. Lord L——* was there. He had just come from Baden-Baden. L—— was fond of Oporto; and it was soon whispered that he was fond of Ralph Vernon's daughter Sybil. But Ralph, who had even more than a tradesman's fancy for nobles, and liked lords in the proper proportion, said that L—— was only polite, and nothing more, and full of moral excellencies. Ralph Vernon was sure of this. He always knew men's characters at a glance; at least, he thought he did. And so he pressed by the hand the gay, sparkling, moral lord, and pressed him to come to M—— whenever he might be in England. They were sorry to leave Oporto and Lord L——. And I am afraid Sybil was sorry, too.

It was six weeks, or nearly, since that morning when the east wind blew in chilling blasts up Milk-street—since the coachman had come east of Temple-

* He is in Parliament now, in the "Liberal" interest.

bar considerably against his will, and, with proper aristocratic feeling, had lost his way. It was six weeks since Charles had seen Sybil, and two since he had heard from her. No news from Edinburgh yet. And Charles was full of doubts all day—doubts which he could not help; and full of strange fears all night, as he lay wakeful and hot. For six weeks is a long time, when our *all* is getting lighter, and nothing comes to help it.

Charles Vernon had gone to dinner. He wasn't hungry, not a bit. But it saved him a little thinking, and it cost him a shilling to dine. Tenpence for what he ate, and twopence for the little waiter. Twopence in charity every day—for it *was* charity, that. Why are paupers prodigal? Why do they give twopence to waiters, when more substantial men only give a penny? Ralph Vernon solved it once; ask him why some people's hearts are always in their way?

Charles Vernon had dined. There was nothing more for tenpence to come, and no pudding, of course, for that. And he was reading the *Times*, before he went back to Milk-street to write till it was dark.

"Waiter, here's a party fainting; look sharp. I saw him staring about so strange just now, and couldn't tell why. Down he went, slap down, just as you see him now, all of a heap. He wants air! air, I say! give him air!"

And so spoke a burly man, a daily visitor to that little tavern, in the great City of London, who only

gave the little waiter a penny. He went through life burly—and by rule.

The little waiter bustled about more than he bustled usually, and tucked the coarse napkin he always carried for twelve hours every day, which looked more like a retired duster, under one of his thin arms. And he knelt not a bit like a waiter beside the party who had fainted clean away—the party whom he liked better than all who ever came there to dine—who gave him twopence always, and had promised sixpence on Christmas day. And the little waiter put out all his strength. It was not much, perhaps; but his heart was all there, too. And he did all he knew, and carried Charles in his arms to the little door for air.

Vernon came to, but not for a long while. He still held the *Times* in his right hand when he first opened his eyes. And with all his force he held it. And it was clenched there firmly and fast, with the strength of a dead man's grip. It was awful to see the colour come, as it did by-and-bye. Awful, as he tried to breathe, as he fought for air, and was able to *think* again.

He looked at the *Times*, and it was then that Charles Vernon thought; and he looked in the waiter's face, where pity was so pale, and said, in a very low voice, "*I'm alone in the world, now.*" Vernon sat up calmly—calmly, on the sanded floor, and said, "*She's dead—Sybil. Oh, God! why don't I die, too?*"

It was true what he spoke then, and it was this which Charles read :

“On the 22nd instant, at No. —, Eaton-square, Sybil, only daughter of Ralph Vernon, Esq., in the eighteenth year of her age.”

CHAPTER V.

It was all out now. This was why he had fainted away, and why he wanted air.

Why is he thinking so? Why does he dare *thought*? Why does he press his thin white hand upon his burning brain, and look so wild, and say "*I will?*"

He started to his feet, and flung the paper down, as he rushed through the little door. He had not paid, but no one stopped him. No, not the little waiter, who had watched Vernon's strange run, as he went down the long street. No, not he, who tucked the duster under his thin arm, and said boldly, "I know *he'll* pay!"

Charles Vernon stood well in that "house" in the City; better than those who were richer far.

And where was he going now?—to Eaton-square?—to his rich father's great house? to Eaton-square, where people of *ton* lived? Charles Vernon *was going there*. And he asked his way in words that were so short and strange that people wondered, as he rushed by, looking so wild, and going west. Charles Ver-

non had wavered first, just when he came to ; his heart failed him as he thought of the dead, but it did not stand in his way ; he did not waver long, and it was then that he said, "I will !" as he sat on the sanded floor. Life was new to Vernon ; new, I mean, by comparison. He thought that people would stare at a man who had not a friend. It was odd for him to think so. How should *people* know ? people who had cares of their own, although not perhaps exactly like his. And such things happen every day.

He got to Eaton-square. It was a long time first, though ; he lost his way so often, but he found it out at last.

Charles Vernon stood at his father's door, and raised the knocker boldly. It was a bold knock that, for a man who had been disowned.

An old man answered it. An old man who was grey when Vernon was born : who had lived in M—— from his birth, and was new to London now. Vernon grasped his hand, the menial hand of the grey old man, and said terribly, "Why did she die?"

Charles Vernon was altered then. He *looked* disowned in every feature, and in every thread. The old man stared at first ; but so would have Ralph at his disinherited son ; he did not know the man who was once a great heir, who had been disinherited because he would *write*. But he soon did, and his face was very sadly changed.

"Oh, Mr. Charles ! and is it *you* ?"

"What, Jacob ! and am I *so* altered then ?"

"Altered! Oh! Mr. Charles——"

"You would tell me Sybil's dead."

"Then you *do* know all. Dead, yes, thank God! dead, for it was better that she *should* have died. She's an angel now, is Miss Sybil—a blessed angel. Oh! Mr. Charles, I saw her die. I asked Missus to let me. But God's will be done. She died so calm, and peaceful like. I had known her eighteen years come Michaelmas. She asked for you so, did Miss Sybil; oh, Mr. Charles, how she *did* call your name."

"My name!" cried the frenzied brother, "Oh, God, great God, be merciful!"

And then Vernon turned to the grey old man, and said gently, "Jacob, tell me all; see, I am calm—I can bear to hear it now."

"Ah! come in, Mr. Charles; Master's out. It's a sad business, and has nearly broke me down; but, mind my words, if there isn't a day of reckoning yet for the man that wronged Miss Sybil."

"Wronged Sybil!—*my* Sybil! Oh! no, no—no one ever wronged *her*!"

"Well, Mr. Charles, this was how it all happened. Lord L——, you know him, was amazingly polite, as you remember, in that Oporto year. I never liked that year any more than I liked him. He comes to London three weeks ago yesterday, and writes a letter to Master at M——. Master answers him polite-like, and says he shall be glad to see him here. Lord L—— walks in that very first day we got to London. It was soon the old game again; it was,

and I saw it, though my eyes ain't so young as they was when you was born, Mr. Charles. He sends opera boxes twice a week. I was afraid of what was coming. Miss Sybil took to him kindly, like. And I don't wonder, neither; he's just the one to please a woman. 'Ansom as paint, and talked religion; he's what's called an 'Evangelical,' or something of that sort, just because he knew that the blessed Book was the only way to win Miss Sybil's heart. Well, Mr. Charles, it did come at last, just as I knew it always would. He asked her to marry him; asked *her*, poor lamb; no, not Master, that wasn't *his* game, because, don't you see, he never meant to marry her."

"And Sybil—*she* fell, then? No, no, Jacob, spare me *that*; say she didn't *fall*."

But Jacob couldn't quite. The old man shook as Charles Vernon, pale and speechless, seemed to hang upon his answer.

"*Fall!* Miss Sybil *fall!* No, no thank God, she was a deal too good and pure for that. She was wronged, deceived; she trusted him. Ah! Mr. Charles, that's where *she* did wrong. You shouldn't trust no one. And *he* had such a soft tongue, whilst Master took to him because he was a Liberal. And he asked her to marry him privately like. It was done. Oh! Mr. Charles! it was done; to think that I should live to see it. She wasn't *married really!*"

"What! the marriage false! Oh, God! I see it now. A foul lie; and yet a fouler and more

devilish wrong. Oh ! L——, thou art doubly, doubly damned."

It was all very true. The chords of Sybil's heart had been touched as she believed with all the calm and loving trust of the undeceived. "Undeceived !" and there—in that one word is the happy evidence of thousands of the young. But what of the "trust" years after? Does it survive the "first half," or is it lost at the first school? You would answer with a shrug of the shoulder you have learned in the world, "The dream of life *then* is the nightmare of suspicion *now*." And Sybil Vernon, canst thou, reader, blame her? Might not such a simulated earnestness as that of the religious peer well plead her excuse? For it hardly seemed engendered amidst the "phrases" of society and the supineness of the world.

"And then she died," said the old man, "Miss Sybil died, of fever on the brain. They take her, Mr. Charles to M——, to-morrow. Hark ! the undertaker's men."

And Charles Vernon listened with that same wild stare which was now so old to him. And it was so, the hissing lead upon Sybil's coffin lid.

Vernon sprang from the old man's side, and rushed up the great grand stairs.

"Back ? back ! for the love of Heaven, back !" And the brother kneeled, the lonely man by his dead sister's side.

"Gone from my sight ; gone for ever."

For the lid was on then.

"Charles Vernon grasped the heavy lead where there was yet no sawder; and Sybil's face smiled from her little pillow as she lay in her coffin there.

"Angel, speak! speak, Sybil, speak. It's Charles asking now!"

The brain of him who was disowned was struck hard then, and the mind was going fast.

Charles Vernon knew not what he said.

"Cold—how cold she is; light a fire; stand away. Cold! cold!"

The men in the trade looked on. They didn't laugh. No; sometimes they might; but *they* couldn't then.

"Cold! cold! why don't they light a fire? They said you were dead, Sybil; but I knew you wouldn't leave *me*."

And he rubbed the hands—the white hands—of that cold clay, and wondered why Sybil lay so still.

"Ah! I remember now. I'm all alone in the world. You've been wronged: you're dead. Oh, Sybil, Sybil, come back!"

How the spasm fought with the truth in that strange man's brain. Reason had sprung from her lair—reason, to rack him again—reason and despair.

Charles stood by the coffin side as he raised the corpse, in its happy sleep, to his own heaving heart, pressing the cold face that smiled so to his own.

"Good bye, Sybil; we shall meet again, but not yet—not yet, but soon." And he said this often

to the still clay; often, sadly and wildly. It was the last good bye to *her*, and he laid the body gently down.

Charles Vernon disinherited — disowned — *alone!* Alone! He only feared *that*. Another kiss on the lips of ice—those lips that were mute for ever. Not a tear fell—not a tear, then. It would have been well for Vernon, perhaps, if one had.

It was all bright in Eaton-square when Charles Vernon reached the street. There was a Drawing-room that day, and all *ton* was going to Court. Lord L—— had been, and was coming back just when Charles reached the square—in a splendid carriage, too. Charles saw him driving past; L—— gay, sparkling as ever. Gay and sparkling in that square, whilst Sybil lay dead close by! Pshaw! such things happen every day.

Charles Vernon tried to speak; he tried hard, too, to cry out, I think; but something seemed to stop him—something seemed to choke him. His brain burned as it had so many times before that day; and, when he came too, and looked about him, Lord L—— was gone—gay, sparkling as ever.

Hours after, the busy world walked over that same spot. Many a man with a speech for the House, whose glories were so near; and many a man with a prayer for his mistress, musingly passed on. Virtue and ambition where vice had left its trail; and near and around a brooding humanity plotted fresh crimes. The sun was hot and high, and it was bright mid-day. Charles Vernon had left the spot hastily, as soon as

he had recovered his feet, and thought of this his first introduction to crime. It had struck home. His head ached violently; and, hardly knowing how, he found himself speaking aloud his angry thoughts. "Crime!" said Vernon, wildly; "there were but a few short days when Heaven could look on earth and say that it was 'good.' Land, sea, and life had hardly stolen in glorious form from shapeless chaos, when the dark doom of Paradise was fixed. How many millions are there dead, and damned by subtle truths that first had life through that forbidden apple! If they had charms to lure amidst the happy ecstasy of Eden, and gave the gloating fiend, then limping from his fall, a chance to raise the corner-stone of hell, for years we mortals count by thousands, they have drugged their victims by the thousand, too. And I, scarce six short months in this city of the world—with front erect—it clogs my very path. Crime! thou may'st, in truth, be much more educated now—much schooled in brilliant phrases and in modern manners—well fed and coyly sleek—as the soul of fashion, ravishing all; but, crime! in essence, thou art just the same. Bashful enough on thy first introduction to Eve: in that particular, there *is* a change. Sneaking and creeping, cringing and crawling, beneath a mask; knowing some juggles, thou hast learnt some lies. And though thou mayst not come, as once thou didst, amidst the glades and bowers of Eden, thou visitest in every home. We clutch thee as debauchery does its last debauch,—as an urchin would a pleasant toy. Oh! bead-roll of all human

woe,—thou mighty, matchless Maelstrom,—Crime :
say, in truth, what art thou? And a whisper steals
from hell: ‘The only heritage of time that never
sleeps, that never dies; that shall live till the trump
of the Judgment Angel; that never asks, that never
will, of thee and at thy hands, poor human fool, an
epitaph or tomb!’ ”

CHAPTER VI.

It was very lovely and warm when Sybil Vernon was buried, at M——. People wondered who once knew Ralph; he looked so altered, and so changed. It was a quiet funeral that, only the father following. Another mourner came, but that was by-and-bye.

“Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life;” and the damp clay fell as these words were spoken upon Sybil’s coffin lid.

There was a loud, deep cry—a hard and a heavy fall: the other mourner had come.

Charles Vernon’s tired brain turned giddy as he had stood so silent by his sister’s grave. It was the old pain, the old pang that so often burned there now.

Ralph Vernon looked up and saw it was his son—his own son, senseless, and so still.

Charles Vernon opened his eyes; but all was over then. The dust lay with dust there for all time.

“Charles.”

But Ralph Vernon spoke too late—too late, a great

deal. Their eyes met over Sybil's grave, and they met again, but Charles did not know his father.

"I was hard upon him; I know it now," said Ralph, the 'thorough man of business.' "He always had so much mind, and so much reason."

Reason! Look, Ralph, see; and there was no reason then.

It was midnight quite when Charles Vernon opened the little gate, and entered the churchyard where his sister lay. He stood by her fresh grave, with the stars above, and no one near; and Charles Vernon was calm then.

A sigh stole through the soft air—the sigh of the disowned man; but the flood-gates of his heart were open—he will do well yet. There were tears in those large grey eyes—tears, as he sat upon the cold earth above his sister's head—tears, as he breathed the last "good-bye," for he was able to *think* again now.

It had been commonly said of Charles Vernon that he had never been a boy: hardly a reproach, though one was intended. As a child, he was often found in *thought*. He fretted beneath the thralldom of the young. Before a discarded toy, the musing boy would often sit, carving out glory in a childish reverie! At fifteen, he studied events, and dared to form his own opinions. At eighteen, he wrote a satire on society: it appeared in the *County Chronicle*, and Vernon was thought a cynic by his "friends." Flattery he repaid by a chilling sneer; and at twenty, the "conventional" gave him up. The whitewash of the world was the theme of his first sarcastic flight.

He was an enigma to "parents and guardians" generally. Oh! curators of embryo men, ye do daily to the thinking child a grievous wrong. Oh! how ye undervalue the aspirations of youth, the dreams of the young. Ye smile at the first challenge of the reflecting boy to worldliness. But there is ridicule there—in that cold, mocking smile. Ye have your "rules" for *all*; for genius and for fools alike. They are, in truth, the same!

Two days after, Charles Vernon knocked at the door in Milk-street, Cheapside. The kind woman welcomed him back—back to her little *home*, as he smiled sadly, and passed on. She saw the change—the change that *was*—the change that was coming, too. And Charles Vernon is now in his room—the home of so small a span—the little old third floor—the room where Sybil had been six weeks before—Sybil, who was dead now.

"Here is a letter, sir; it came yesterday."

Charles Vernon looked at the woman who held the letter, but he saw nothing clearly. On the table lay his papers, just as he had left them, with starvation written upon every sheet. Charles Vernon had nothing left—nothing—no one in the world, when he knocked that day in Milk-street.

Perhaps he felt this when he cried, "I burn—water—water—here—here!" pressing his hand upon his brain—the old spot, too—with greater force than ever. In another minute he reeled up wildly, and tore the letter from the woman's hand.

"Ha! ha! God bless you, North! saved—saved!"

And that was all he said.

Charles Vernon fell back upon his little bed, and his heavy eyes rolled fearfully. The kind woman leant over him, doing all she knew for her strange, changed lodger. So, something pitied still.

Ralph Vernon, look from thy splendour in Eaton-square upon the little bed that is here. It's in Milk-street, Cheapside; third floor; no one knows it; you may have to ask the way. See the man who hated trade, who would *write* for his living; and see the woman who kneels there—*there*, by his bed-side. Well, Ralph, does he starve? Not yet, quite. See, she kneels still. It is not his mother—no—who brings the cup to his hot lips, and holds his aching head. Who is that foaming so? See, Ralph, see, it is Charles who is foaming there; thy first-born—the disowned—Charles, who says so wildly that he is “on fire.” See the flush of fever on the sunken face, urging the cry of “drink! drink!” It will be a long time, Ralph, before *that* cry is over. Look what a wreck now. *He* couldn't “*write*,” could he? “There was so much mind, and so much reason.”

See, Ralph, see; *there is no reason now.*

CHAPTER VII.

SYBIL VERNON went to Edinburgh, but it was some time first. Two days after her visit of joy and love to Milk-street, her father left Eaton-square for the north, and she went with him. But business took Ralph Vernon to Glasgow, and kept him there for two weeks or more—long weeks, too, of slow torture to poor Sybil. How she did write to Charles; and how she told him, for her sake, to keep up his spirits, because she knew, and was quite sure, all would go well. He would be a great writer yet—so Sybil told him. “And I’m not dull, Charles; no not a bit.” Full of her own trouble, too, she said this; but that was not quite true.

Ralph Vernon’s business was done now. Sybil could have cried for joy when they drove up to the station; and the porter helped her out of the fly and said, “Edinburgh first class, Miss?” It was evening when they got there. Poor Sybil, how full her sister’s heart was when the train stopped at last and they were fairly on their feet again. Sybil wanted to go at once to Mr. North then. But

nothing was possible that night, so there was nothing for her to do but wait. Sybil's little store of patience was sorely taxed as they drove to the hotel. She went straight up-stairs into her own room, which looked out into a great square, as soon as ever they had dined. She looked out of that window a dozen times at least, wondering more and more where Mr. North lived. Sybil tried hard to sleep, but she could not till she knew. A strange girl was Sybil when once she had put her whole *heart* into anything and had said firmly, "I will try." So she rang her bell and made friends with the chambermaid, who smiled at the way Sybil talked, but had never heard of Mr. North, so there was no help for the tired heart—it must wait till morning.

A wonderful heart was hers. She opened the great box where Charles's papers were snugly packed under some of her own clothes, and great was the comfort that ensued to Sybil on finding all safe. "Dear, dear brother, you will be rich soon now." She looked on those papers as so much glory. Sybil *believed* in Charles, and a very good creed too. "Father in Heaven, save *him*." The sister was at her prayers now, right over the great box, and brushed away a stray tear she could not at all account for, and when the moon rose and shone into that great room, Sybil was smiling in her first sleep, Charles's papers under her pillow, and the gentle watcher of the brother's hopes was quite happy then.

I really don't think Charles himself was up and at work a bit earlier than Sybil was, the next morning.

She counted all the pages again to see that none were missing; each had a price, a sister's price, to her. The work of weeks, when a tired brain had hoped on. And Sybil cried over them—she cried, and could not help it; it was a way Sybil had when others would have smiled.

But Ralph Vernon was early too. Sybil met him on the stairs, with his hat in his hand. He was going out, and asked her to come; so she began that long day sorrowfully. There was no excuse for saying "No," and at six o'clock in the evening. Charles's papers were still safe in Sybil's great box. The sister's heart now was full of desperate things. Charles, paler than when last she saw him, and looking wild and strange. Sybil could not face another night; she could not stand the thought. Ralph had wanted his daughter all day to go here and to go there, and after dinner she was so tired she could hardly stand.

Now was Sybil's time. On the sofa lay her father asleep for a good hour. Tired, she stole up-stairs, but she ran for all that; there were the papers, all right. To put on her bonnet and shawl was the work of a minute, and no more. Sybil, to make all things sure, had just one look at her father, and she went down the great stairs two at a time, fairly hugging her trust, with her woman's heart in her mouth.

Sybil met the waiter in the hall, who told her where Mr. North lived. He knew—that waiter did—he had "a great respect" for Mr. North. I, who

write, once heard him say so. Nothing seemed to stop Sybil now, as she slipped through the great doors into the quiet square, with Charles's papers close to her heart, under her little shawl.

It was quite light when Sybil went on her glad way to Mr. North that evening. If you ask me, I do not think she saw anyone, or anything. Sometimes for a moment she did stop, but that was only to see the name of the street, and make quite sure she was going right. If that sister in her hallowed mission held these papers a little tighter than most people, perhaps, would, it was no great wonder. They were her hope and Charles's, and the tired feet almost ran when she thought so. Sybil's troubles that night were not over yet. "Mr. North was not at home." The sad sister looked at the servant that said so, and fancied no one pitied her. He was in George-street, and she went willing, but—how tired!

If that sweet girl's feet began to fail her, her heart did not. She had done much that day, but she would have done more for Charles. "Mr. North *was* within," so for poor Sybil there was some comfort at last. "I'm so glad," she half cried; and Sybil could not have helped it, not for ever so much.

The servant smiled when Sybil asked, in all her innocence, for *Mr. North*. "Would Mr. North see her?" "Did he think Mr. North would be so kind?" Sybil's only excuse for asking that was that she did not know him. What moments were those as she so hopefully waited in the little room into which the

servant had shown her. What a strange flutter at her heart when she heard the proud step, the noble tread, and North stood before her—grand, even in the light that was there then.

Poor foolish Sybil, she told her story quite in her own way, beginning at the wrong end, and contradicting herself a dozen times at least, in just as many minutes. North was very busy when she came, with Charles's papers under her shawl. He had worked all that day long, but he was soon busy in Sybil's troubles. Getting courage as she went on, she was soon at North's knees. He raised her with all his gentleness, and Sybil could have hung about his neck ; she was so joyous then. I am afraid she forgot herself quite when she took North's hand, and said, as she only could, "You will save *him*, won't you ; you will save Charles ?"

Christopher North looked on. He was not busy now. He only felt for her, as she took the papers tremblingly from beneath her little shawl, wrapped with all her care in a green bag which she herself had made. The scene was one after North's great heart, and his words Sybil never forgot.

The calm had come at last. Sybil was not tired now. North wanted to see her home ; but she would not let him, and was out of sight before he had well fetched his hat. Sybil hardly felt the pavement as she went along with the green bag empty in her hand, and her eyes were red when she got back to the hotel in that great square. Poor Sybil ! she had so much to say, and no one to say it to. She wanted a

good cry, and she had had it. Sybil was full of the grand old man, as she sat at tea that night. It was on her lips a dozen times to tell her father all. She wanted others to be glad too; but Sybil kept her secret bravely; and her full heart spoke all it felt in a grateful prayer for North as she kneeled by her bed that night, and mingled him gladly with those she loved. And in her dreams, which came later, she saw him too—saw him as he was. The long hair, the noble face, the rugged form; North stood by Charles's side, and the pale face looked up from its long work in Milk-street, in Sybil's happy dream. And the sister saw what was to come—she saw a brother saved.

* * * * *

Ralph stayed in Edinburgh only three days. North read the papers which the sweet girl that had so strangely moved him left. He liked the "*high tone*," and *Blackwood* was their fate and future.

So Christopher North had saved another. His bounty came in time. It would have gladdened the tired heart—Sybil's fond heart—to have known it; but that was not to be.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is now some years since I, who write, received intelligence of the insidious illness of Charles Vernon, always my friend, and once my patient. I had known him when he laboured without hire; I had watched his early struggles, when all "his friends" were railing at him "for his good." I had watched the fresh, the buoyant enthusiasm that defied the world's advice to "stick to business;" that would *write*, and that did *write* till the tired brain gave way. I had seen him first when the spasm struck his reason, as he sate alone in Milk-street; I had heard the cry of "Drink! drink!" start from his burning lips; I had seen North's saving letter clutched in that fearful grip; and I knew what his end must be. He left abruptly. For months I tried to trace him, but in vain; and some years had elapsed when, quite by accident, I heard that he was living alone, at the Lakes, subject to periodical attacks, that necessitated his being placed under strict restraint. My interest

in the terrible reality of his crushed hopes and stricken reason was an absorbing sympathy that I never even felt for my own kin. Charles Vernon had lain on my breast:—I can hear that laugh now, ringing through the lapse of time; and I can hear his cry, “I burn! I burn!” and I can hear, too, his fearful prayer, as he kneeled, in his frenzy, at my feet, and thought *I* was his father. Once to know Charles Vernon was to forget him *never*. That scene in Milk-street is before me now—now, whilst this pen moves; but once it was fresher still—once, whilst I determined that, when my engagements would permit, I would seek out Vernon in his own little home. Circumstances were favourable. It was May, but a dull season to me; and I resolved to start at once. Very early the morning after I had come to this resolution, I was unexpectedly called to see a patient, and on my return my way lay over Westminster Bridge. My thoughts, as I walked along, would turn to Charles Vernon, the man who was disowned for *thought*,—who was “too high-toned.” I stopped, as memories led me back to the little third-floor room, and I gazed abstractedly upon the filthy tide. My serious contemplation was not much disturbed, and it was only a matter of chance that on looking up, I saw before me, unassured and almost trembling, a beggar boy, upon whose face streams, as black as that which ran beneath the bridge, coursed from his full, meaning eyes. I saw, too, as the wind moved amidst

his rags, that his pale lips seemed to quiver, as though, in his heart, he wanted, and tried hard, to speak.

"Well, my boy, what can I do for you?" I asked, in a tone as feeling as I hope it was kind.

No answer. A hard struggle only *within*,—within—the tenant of those shapeless rags. But there were tributary streams now—of something which meant gratitude—feeding the channels of that beggar's joy.

"Can I serve you?" I asked more softly still. The words went to the soul of that ragged out-cast, and the pale face brightened into a warming smile. Low life, courteous reader—ay the lowest—but feelings as "high" as the houses in Belgrave-square.

He was no skulking apprentice to crime. He had no "honourable obligations," savouring of the nature of honour amongst thieves, to fulfil there. No dare-devil "pal" to compensate, or save. And my words, I think, assured him. Perhaps he had dreaded a blow. Perhaps the measured words of the "Philanthropists!" who are never "taken in," or the more dreaded and equally familiar mandate to "move on." And he answered gently, as he drew his bare feet from the gutter of mud—

"I'd like to *serve* yer honour."

"Where are your parents, my boy? Should you not rather serve them?"

An amazed look, but no answer.

"What are your father and mother?"

"Father's dead, and mother's in Bellam, mad; ain't she just, though."

"And your father is dead; what did he die of?"

"Gin!" was the unwilling answer.

"And your mother, you say, is in Bedlam?"

"Ay! please yer honour, and she did this ere," pointing to a scar over his left eye; "but she's chained up now, is poor mother."

"And your brothers and sisters?"

"I never 'ad none, as I knows of."

"Then with whom *do* you live, my boy?"

"I lives alone, on any gemmun's steps as let's me. And there I sleeps, too, yer honour, when the pleece don't make me move on."

"Were you ever in prison?" I asked, unwillingly; for I supposed I ought to inquire, according to the charitable usages of the "best society."

A burning blush was the only answer. The blush of the wronged, not the shamed; and you could see it through the dirt of the outcast's thin face.

"No," said the boy, through a burst of tears.

"I ain't never come to *that*;" and the "innocent" seemed as though he would kneel—as though he would prove this. I could have begged his pardon.

There were no sickly qualms about "character" now. I looked into the pleading face of the orphan boy, where—traced in lines of truth—I read a

"written *character*." I was resolved—I took the outcast upon trust.

"Call on me this evening at —, and I will see what I can do for you."

Again the boy wanted to speak; and again the words would not come.

When I looked for him again, he had disappeared, mysteriously, as before.

Men passed me now whose faces looked full of business, for men begin to buy and sell very early. But they did not notice me.

It was the London season then. As I stood upon the bridge, delicate girls, hectic and young, passed by to their long day's work in the "best houses," trudging, with coughs and pale faces, to the withering toil that began so early. But I knew nothing of the thin hands beneath the thin shawls there, nor the "extra hours" of those who saved up just a little, and then went for a breath of air to Gravesend—to die. And I knew not that many of the delicate girls who passed me then with coughs of a sad purpose, pale faces, and thin hands, often died actually before the last stitch was put to their dreary work. And no one missed *them*; no one loved *them*; they left no void *here*, for the father and mother of those children of toil were already forgotten in one grave—only six feet deep, in the quiet little churchyard of a quiet little church, where people—who had never heard of the London season—went to pray.

And such as these hurried by to the back rooms of an early death ; all to *one* destruction.

And others there were who carried things to market — burly and strong — as they sang bits of old songs, and smoked bits of old pipes, and seemed full of health ; and so they were, because they did not live in London. And others, again, who looked stricken and pale, as they talked to themselves, wildly, and seemed full of strange cares, and lived in London always. There on that bridge, a lesson of life ; and that lesson teaches now.

“ By-the-bye, you don’t happen to want a boy—a second hand—in the stable, I suppose ? ” I asked of a friend that afternoon as we sate talking over our wine.

“ A boy ! I just happen to want the very thing. The last was pious, highly recommended, with most respectable parents. He took me in, and the respectable progeny is doing a little mild work at the treadmill for laying on of hands. You take me ! If his fingers are not tired, his legs may be, I fancy. What sort of a character has your article got—parents Evangelical, and so forth ? ”

“ He *must* have a character, then ! ” I asked.

“ No, no. I don’t say that. I’ll try the experiment of having one without. Fill up your glass—consider the place his ; ” said my friend, with more than his usual air of accommodating ‘ indifferentism.’

Suffice it simply to say, before twelve hours were

over, the little outcast had a career before him. My friend, by way of precaution, for he hated nothing so much as being "taken in," inquired at the hospital at which the boy had said his mother was, and, his story being there corroborated in full, he was taken without a character, and entered happily upon his duties as second hand and groom—"in waiting!"

Charles Vernon's little home was situated on a lovely elevation by the waters of Ullswater. Thither I now dispatched my things, purposing to take with me only such necessaries as I myself could carry. Business, for which there was no possible postponement, detained me reluctantly in town for two days, and it was not until the evening of the second that I left London, arriving at Kendal about five the next morning, and from thence to Windermere by coach.

Having there refreshed myself with a substantial breakfast, I proceeded on foot to Bowness, a northern village not to be surpassed in quiet "homesomeness," where, meeting a solitary boatman, I desired that I might be rowed to the Waterhead.

The sublime lake looked exquisitely lovely. Here and there, still hung a little mist, as if to complete the glowing picture, but not enough to spoil it, and nothing moved around the isle "called Beautiful" saving the restless char, whilst the towering "Pikes" of Langdale were bathed with the risen sun. Not a leaf seemed then to stir. Not a whisper of man's

life seemed abroad to challenge nature *there*—to break the hallowed silence of that still and glorious scene.

Windermere! in the bright halo of the opening day! Masterpiece—so masterlike of Heaven's studio! What is the cold daub on canvas but a mockery to thee?

Then Elleray came in sight, enshrined amidst her guardian trees. That Elleray where North lived, and which North loved. Yes, there was Elleray still, faintly seen amongst those trees that his "child angel" played beneath when she was quite young, and had soft eyes and no cares, and which her proud and noble father *would* have spared, and not a bough of which would he have touched, because *she* loved them and their sheltering shade.

North called it a "blessed place." Ay! and so it was then. But those who were living once are dead now. Christopher sleeps in his quiet grave; for time, of course, moves on at Elleray.

And now Calgarth comes in view. As we glided over the deep enchantment, I remembered that Watson once lived there—"good Bishop Watson," as he was called, and so he was. And the glassy Mere still laves the shore of Calgarth, as it did when Watson lived there years ago. Here man has not "improved" on nature, and man's Arch Maker smiles approving praise.

Having reached the Waterhead, and rested there

for some hours, at morn I started for the foot of Helvellyn, about nine miles distant, determining, if possible, to cross the mountain that night, and sleep at Ullswater. My road lay, for a considerable distance, through much of the finest scenery of the Lake District. "Cockneyism," too, was little known there then, to leave its stamp of the ridiculous or vulgar on every point of the sublime.

I arrived at Rydal about one, and, pushing on somewhat leisurely, reached Grassmere an hour later. Finding, then, that I had still several hours of daylight before me, I—who was no stranger to the place or scene—struck out of the main road, and, after a few minutes' walking, entered Grassmere churchyard. Immediately before me William Wordsworth sate upon a grave-stone. I, who had known the poet years before, remembered the old man's smile, and saw it was not changed; and I remembered, too, that he would say kind things, whilst in his heart he meant them.

Wordsworth looked up from his unfinished verse, and I saw the same simplicity upon the gathering lines of the face, which were growing old. But the poet knew me not, and I thought of Rydal Mount as it used to be in the days I could just remember when I was a boy, and of the pony which was quite a favourite, and very grey. And as I stepped above the graves, and read there the records that spoke in

stone, I looked on the poet, whose verse was done. And as I saw him feebly walk away, I saw, too, in that step the marks of time, and thought of the muse that would soon be still. "Sacred to the memory of William Wordsworth! Sacred!" and whenever stone should say so, I reverently felt *that* would be true.

CHAPTER IX.

RETRACING my steps for about a quarter of a mile, I was soon once more on my way.

After proceeding leisurely in this manner for perhaps an hour-and-a-half, up steep hills, and through a rough wild pass, where the stony mountains seemed to kiss the clouds, which were quite fleecy, and skimmed swiftly from peak to peak, I entered Cumberland.

The division of the two counties is marked even to this day with tolerable distinctness by a large heap of rough stones, beneath which, if the traveller is polite enough to believe tradition, and not over sceptical in the matter of local history, he is to believe the remains of the last king of Cumberland to repose through centuries, even to this day.

In half-an-hour more I had reached the mountain-foot. From the Keswick-road, where I then stood, Helvellyn looks poor ; and one is loth to believe it the "mighty" hill spoken of by the then Laureate.

I here determined to rest and dine, and avail myself

of such accommodation as the limited resources of the place afforded.

I found everything scrupulously clean, and a quarrel with the homely fare set before me out of the question. Immediately in front of the little inn stands one of the smallest chapels in England, a source of huge amazement to all climbing cockneys.

At five o'clock I prepared for the ascent—some-what an unusual occurrence in those days—resolving, moreover, to cross unaccompanied, although the service of a guide was strongly urged upon me. I soon observed, with some uneasiness, that a change for the worse in the weather was at hand. The light, fleecy clouds, which, a few hours before, had kissed the mountain-tops, had rolled on now. Dark mists swept by, damping as a drifting rain, and gathering in all directions as they covered Helvellyn's head. The wind, too, blew in fitful gusts, and moaned drearily through the quiet valley, which began to look cold and bleak.

Two guides, who had watched me from the first, seeing the danger, of which I was unconscious, called loudly after me to return, urging upon me, with a disinterestedness often met with in those parts, the peril of an ascent with such a night at hand.

But I, who had very different thoughts, heeded them not, except, indeed, to shout my thanks, and was soon lost to their sight in the mist.

At every step, I encountered a fresh obstacle. The path was by no means clearly defined; and, although the geography of the mountain comparatively

well, all my knowledge, in such weather, availed me nothing.

Totally unprepared, too, for the suddenness of the unwelcome change, I was soon wet to the skin, and had hopelessly lost my way. Occasionally, indeed, the mocking mist cleared off immediately around me, and I was then enabled to discover the barren peaks of the neighbouring mountains far below me.

It was now intensely cold—cold in that day of May; and nothing in its way could well exceed the rugged grandeur of the scene, as the clouds—from some illimitable source—swept by me with amazing swiftness, chilling me to the heart with their heavy damps.

So far had I proceeded, as it were mechanically, and was resolving in my own mind that I could be at no very considerable distance from the summit, when I heard the loud and repeated barking of a dog close by.

In a few minutes I was surrounded by a large flock of sheep—the tinkling of the bells of those which loved to wander being, indeed, the only sound that broke the silence of the mountain.

“How far am I from Helvellyn man?” said I to the shepherd, referring to the heap of stones which is traditionally held to mark the highest point.

“Helvellyn, mon!” said the shepherd, with a rough Cumberland smile, shaking the wet from his dripping hat; “for the matter o’ thot, harppen threæ mile—harppen more; but, axing yer pardon, what *can* you want in Helvellyn, mon, on sooch a day as this? You had better coom wi’ me to Whythburn.”

"I must reach Ullswater to-night," said I, shivering from the increasing cold and wet. "Pshaw! what is this to me? And look here, I'll thank and pay you to show me the nearest way."

"Well, Sir, if so be you moost, I s'pose you moost; but for the love o' God have a care o' the tarn, for it's an oogly sput at the best. Howsomever, if you will, begging yer pardon, keep a lile* to the right for harffen a mile, till you coom to the big tarn. It's block deep, and I took a Lunnun genelman out, mooch sooch another as yer, a year ago or mair, as dead as yon coble.† Then bear to the left, for near upon four mile; and if so be you should lose your way, why ne'er be frightened, as my hoot (hut) is not so far from the tarn, and yer'll be quite welcome, I 'sure thee. But it's a fool's trick to go on nigh yon tarn in sooch a mist as this; you had better coom wi' me."

"No, thank you," I said, smiling; "I'm not afraid of a drop of rain or a wet skin," and slipping, with some difficulty, a bright coin into the unwilling palm of the old shepherd, I was soon quite out of sight.

In ten minutes, I had again as completely lost my way. I had wandered in this manner until my watch told me it was eight, and still sought in vain, through the mist, for the tarn.

The darkness of a premature night was setting in, and the watery clouds still grew and gathered. Fancying the tarn must be more to the left, I altered my course, and bent my steps in that direction.

* A little.

† A big stone.

The scene, just then, was amazingly grand, and I thought so too. The valley of Griesdale lay before me, and the wind, which was now very high, and much more constant, blew the rain with cutting force into my face. But still the grandeur awed me, and it spoke to my very soul.

I was lost where art has never been—where man had seldom trod. I was lost where nature's strength runs wild and loose; and I stumbled over big stones, which had rested there—through the shocks of ages and the mutations of time—there, on that mountain side—for centuries, perhaps longer; and I stumbled, too, into little streams, with a soft eternal murmur, that had never grown; and saw I things as God made them, when they stole from chaos to make an Eden there: and I knew the mark of the OMNIPOTENT!

Another hour's brisk walking brought me to the tarn. It was now half-past nine, the difficulty of keeping the slippery path and avoiding the dreaded water by my side momentarily increasing; but I still kept on my way, following a stream which was always a winding one, and now and then swollen, with the hope that, if I persevered, it would eventually lead me to Ullswater.

Helvellyn itself now lay immediately to my left, and I was in the most unsheltered part of one of England's wildest valleys. I had long since lost the path, and found myself at constant intervals up to my knees in a bog. I was thankful that the plunge was not extended to my neck. The rain, which for hours had never ceased, was now a complete flood, and my very frame shivered with the piercing cold;—

and the cold was piercing in that barren valley, when May was at its height.

I have longed, at Helvellyn's foot, when nature seemed scorched on a hot August day, to leave my coat behind me; but I have felt a wintry cold before I reached the top.

Hardly knowing now what to do, or, indeed, where to turn, I remembered the hut which the shepherd spoke of; and thought, moreover, I might as well use my lungs, and see if by that means I could gain the sympathy of those—if any—who, in that valley, were hospitably disposed; and, on the impulse, again and again I shouted, and the sullen echoes seemed to mock me as they rolled through that mountain-pass, and mingled as though with the wind, which moaned drearily.

My situation had now lost all the excitement even of a dangerous novelty; but it still blew, and it still rained, and I was far from the nearest cottage, where a bright light was burning now, though I did not see it. The darkness thickened till, almost, it could be *felt*. Undecided as to what I should do—for there was peril in my situation then—I halted, in the hope that I might hear some friendly sign. I waited long and anxiously for the faintest sound that might bring me hope throughout the length of that long, bleak valley. Again my shout for help, as I strode along, echoed from mountain to mountain, and from side to side, and this time I fancied it was answered. I was not deceived; and in a few moments a man, dripping with the rain, stood before me.

"A rough night!" said the stranger, in a voice singularly soft and clear. "Your wish is to reach Ullswater to-night? You have lost your way?" I bowed. "I know, and am known, in these parts, and, if you do not regard a stranger's unasked advice as an impertinence, I would caution you against proceeding further. We are at least two miles from the nearest cottage, and the way is a puzzle at mid-day. I, too, have been surprised in this storm, and have been forced to take refuge in a shepherd's hut but a stone's throw from this spot. If you are hungry, I have enough to sup us both. If," continued the stranger, whilst a deep meaning seemed to lurk in every word, "you have not yet mixed sufficiently with what is called the best society to disdain the plainest fare; and, when you would sleep, straw enough to rest us both, if you have not yet learnt to distrust every stranger who has no sponsor for his good intentions but his—honour."

The sarcasm—almost a sneer—in the emphatic distinctness of the Unknown's words was but as nothing to the quiet satire which trembled on the lips that uttered them. The world's lover, baulked in the zenith of his frenzied love, ere the first back-fall dashed his restless hopes to atoms, could not have spoken in a tone more bitter. And I answered, "I have learnt from experience that the longest life is not long enough—though a century in span—to teach us to distinguish between the real honour of the *few* and the subtle counterfeit of the *many*, when the sun of noon may shine. In truth, in the dark the puzzle is harder. But, although I have learnt to suspect, *as*

a rule, I am too firm a believer in the actual being of better and of nobler things to forswear altogether exceptions."

"You speak of experience—you talk of exceptions. Pardon me; but is your knowledge of either a deep one? A mere acquaintanceship, or a harsh and hard familiarity? Experience! Has it for ever dogged your path, and never come but as a withering blight to you and yours? Do you not *fancy* where you have not *felt*?" said the Unknown, with the same calm smile of irony.

I was silent. I was struck rather with the searching tone in which these words were spoken, than with the words themselves. And the stranger now led the way for some minutes—in silence, too—until we reached a hut, the door of which being open, I discovered, to my infinite satisfaction, in one corner the glowing embers of a fire.

"The sticks shall soon crack," said the Unknown, as he fed the flame with dry wood; and, insisting upon my swallowing a glass of Cognac, which he declared to be an infallible preventive against all cold, he took from the pocket of a rough, wet coat such supper as he had to offer.

"If I may ask the question, you, too, have lost your way?" I said, who had, as yet, in the imperfect light, been vainly endeavouring to gather anything definite respecting the stranger's personal appearance.

"Lost my way? Yes. But hardly as you imagine. Not here, beneath this mole-hill. I have lost my way in the world."

The stranger said this in the tone of one who, for various reasons, desires to be no further interrogated. I took the hint, and once more relapsed into silence.

“It may—nay, indeed, it must—seem strange to you that I should not have lost my way, and yet am here on such a night. At some future time, should we ever meet again, should you then desire a better acquaintanceship—if you would,” continued the Unknown, his voice sinking to a whisper, whilst his eyes pierced me through and through, “associate yourself with a *broken man*—you shall know more of one who must seem strange enough. I am staying in these parts. I may leave them to-morrow, for, whilst my dwelling is anywhere, my home is nowhere. But what care you to know this? What is the misanthrope, who mingles but little with the living, because his thoughts are with the dead—what is he to you? Forget him.”

To me it seemed as though, in years gone by, I had seen that tearful face, which was so passing fair. But where?—and the thought baffled me. I could not let him leave me thus. Those tears, so real;—there was no deception there, and my heart rose at the thought as it beat high with great throbs of earnest pity.

Tears! and yet I thought I have seen them glistening in the bloodshot eyes of an “unexceptionable” knave. Ay, and the counterfeit took me in. Deceived, yet trusting still. Tears! I have seen them in the dull eyes that were heavy with gin—that were hot with devilish things. Tears! I

have seen that dew, like pearls, gathering on the young eyes of the shamed and the wronged. Tears! I have seen them wrung in streams of agony from the last hope of the breaking heart. Tears! I have seen them born of onions, falling damply on the sheet that gives a legacy. Humanity's photograph is in the deception of tears. But truth is in *this* dew. I thought, and felt it in my heart of hearts, that my conviction did not err.

In a few minutes the stranger resumed, in that strange voice of thrilling sweetness which I began to fancy I had heard before, and from which no emotion seemed to lure him :—

“This hut is comfortable enough; the shepherd who owns it is well known to me. I was able to do him a service once, and, strange to say, his gratitude outlived the service. He has a rough exterior enough, and a clown's manners at best, but a heart which knows nothing of the world's nice distinctions. He would treat a peer as he would his fellow. All with wet skins are welcomed here. For myself, I have not a relation in the world. That seemingly surprises you. As a circumstance it, perhaps, is rare. I have not a friend, God be my witness; although, as a circumstance, that is common enough: but pardon me, you must be tired. That straw is fresh and clean, and you may yet think yourself born to good luck if you never meet with a harder or a rougher pillow. Is it,” continued the stranger, extending his hand, “mutual to hope for a better acquaintance on the morrow?”

“You guess me right,” I said, warmly; “and

may I hope you to believe it something less vulgar than curiosity, and something much more grateful, when I ask the name of one to whom already I am so much indebted?"

"Can it be worth your while to know a man without relations or a friend? What would be your gain? I am called Vernon—Charles Vernon; a name," said he, bitterly, "for women to lisp, and a large acquaintance to follow; hardly the *cynic's* title. It was my godfather's before me—a discriminating tradesman who disowned my father in early days, and, with exquisite taste stood sponsor for me when my father's fortunes mended. Out of compliment to him my name was chosen. Know as a man of means, it was thought the compliment over the font might come back with interest; but it didn't. The tradesman suspended payments, and a cut was established; but he taught me a little of the world, if he never did the ten commandments."

I was on the point of interrupting him at least a dozen times. The voice that had seemed familiar was indeed his. That music God had never given to another. I snatched a burning faggot from the pile, and by its light gazed into the hollow face that was once so fair. Our eyes met. The wild stare was but for a moment, and my hand was in that iron grasp. There *was* a little change. Charles Vernon was nearly grey. We talked of the past when I saw that he could bear it. Sybil's was the only name that moved him. The changes of years were soon told. The wreck before me still—*wrote on.*

"I will show you where I live to-morrow," said Vernon, smiling, "but it is some miles from here. It is late, and we should be stirring early." Saying which, he laid himself down upon his allotted division of the straw.

By what light there was I saw the hectic flush upon his face. There was "heart-break" behind that dignity of form—and so it was. A man above the middle height, with a splendid forehead, and that inimitable bearing for which there is no counterfeit.

"Splendid forehead!" The mediocre man—with pedigree that knew the Conquest, and touched these shores with Norman William—curling his whiskers, and trimming his speech, sees with ecstasy his "splendid forehead" stamped upon his child. The tiny puling thing has got "the gift," and who knows may yet enjoy the same rare credit for his sense as did his father. O! want of wit, that "splendid foreheads" hide. It's a noble thing—a grace superb. But I have often seen it in a fool as marked—believe me, reader—as his folly!

As by the trembling light of the dying fire I still watched, I saw the man who would *write*, who had no kin, and not a friend, kneel on his bed of straw, whilst to his heart he seemed to clasp a book. His lips moved, and I saw the man who was friendless pray, whilst that prayer seemed not of earth in earnestness. He soon was still—the heavy rain without, the heavy breathing within; and, whilst he slept, a smile awoke upon his pale face into a living thing.

CHAPTER X.

UPON opening his eyes the next morning, Charles Vernon found it to be just six. The air was deliciously cool. Hundreds of little streams, swollen into importance by the late rains, coursed down the steep sides of the great mountain, upon whose lofty head, stretching far into the bright blue sky, there shone the sun of heaven in a thousand hues. Nothing was restless *there*. All seemed hushed and still, saving those soft sounds which float in the glad and grateful melody of returning day, breathing in every chord their welcome to the holy birth. And that delicious calm spoke to the heart of hearts of that strange, friendless man. And he stole gently and quietly from his straw to my own side, and gazing on the perhaps glad face that had many friends, lived as he gazed in the memory of the past. He told me so long after; and tears—hot tears, stood in the full eyes of the disowned man. And that full eye had been bright once—bright with the belief of youth's strong hopes; but *that* was long ago. Then he walked from the little hut, and bathed his brow in a mountain stream; and, perhaps, in the holy of holies of the heart of that tired man, the Great Eternal had placed a hope—a hope that he, too,

felt as he stood in the dark shadows of those sunlit hills. On returning, Charles Vernon found me rubbing my eyes with a bewildered look, and a somewhat confused and indistinct remembrance of the events of the preceding night.

"Good morning," said he smiling. "You do not seem to have quarrelled with the straw; but it is time we should be moving. We will breakfast yonder when you feel inclined." And as he spoke he pointed to where I saw through a clump of trees a thin curl of white smoke, which seemed to evidence the whereabouts of a small cottage.

"That stream looks tempting enough, and I am half inclined to try a plunge," I said, as, walking to the door, I looked at the clear water bubbling and murmuring through the still valley, whilst my companion seemed to watch with eagerness the effect of that scene upon me. "Indeed," I continued, "what last night I began to fancy the worst luck, has turned out well beyond expectation. I would not have missed this bit of loveliness for the softest bed in moneyed England."

"You speak but the truth," said Vernon, as the soft air of the valley just waved his fair hair. "This scene is more than lovely, but your delight is by no means common; for there are men—such indeed they would have us believe them, and I have met them, too, in shoals—who would stand as we do now—yes, where we do—and ask, in a restless way, of the first stranger they met where the nearest billiard-table was. Ah!" continued he, with a meaning smile,

"you spoke of experience last night, and you are strangely amazed now. These men have hearts that can warm, have souls that can glow—so we ought to believe—and they see more fascination in the chances and follies of pool than in the majesty of nature. These are *society's* hearts and souls—to all deceits conventional *alive*! to every noble impulse *dead*! I have met them," continued he, whilst his mellow voice rose in power, and the smile of irony curled upon his lips, pointing to Helvellyn as he spoke, "and I have heard them say of a mountain such as this, that Providence had clearly blundered. Ay! start not, start not, your own experience may gather trifles every day. They would measure a boundless nature by their own pigmy span—they would level that hill for commercial purposes, they would clog that nature with the spread of trade; but see, there are others abroad before us."

As he spoke, we heard the report of a gun, and, looking in the direction whence the sound appeared to come, I saw a man who, in the distance even, seemed commanding, with long hair streaming over his broad shoulders, and a bearing as noble as it seemed rugged and free.

"Ah!" said Charles Vernon, "Christopher North has shamed us; look at him. I could for ever, and I have reason, too." And he watched North out of sight. Then, turning to me, he said, in a soft voice that never jarred, and in words in every one of which a fascination seemed to linger, "There never was, perhaps, a finer, choicer, rarer specimen of a MAN,

or one in whom human perfection—so far, indeed, as humanity is a judge—was more strongly developed and centred than in Christopher North. On this earth there never walked a nobler; and whilst I daily see, with that contempt I cannot master or conceal, the rank unmasked effminacy—call it elegance, if you will—of the sickly, soulless votaries of sanctioned vice we bring our daughters up to worship and to marry, I wonder sometimes, as I brood alone, if that wondrous mould which gave us North will ever give us such another manly heart and noble soul; and whilst I ponder on these things, I have, I must unwillingly confess, but little hope in such a marvel. Is it because these sickly pampered men are those whom *society* loves to *fête*, and who, with gaudy fascination in their very wake, float in voluptuous ease and shallow emptiness in every drawing-room, like butterflies from flower to flower, drawing honey from each girlish bud,—reeking from some hell, or some debauchery, and which how many unsuspecting mothers lead with glowing pride and rapture to their daughter's and their darling's side, and see her in *their arms*;—is it, oh! is it, because, I dare to say, that men like these are loathsome plague-spots on society, that I am for ever to be told that I am *jealous* of their success, and *envious* of their sleek and matchless elegance?—*jealous*! of those who prey on all that is pure; upon all that is best and brightest, breaking unsuspecting, trusting hearts as they would the choice hells! I *jealous* of such ineffable No! hurl me to the lowest level of a beggar, and give me a broom—existing

but from hand to mouth on halfpence and compassion, upon no broader issue than a London crossing—I would thank my God with pride and gratitude that *that* was my inheritance.”

As he ceased, I, who had felt the strange fascination of every word, looked at the man who spoke so earnestly ; and I saw a tear in those large grey eyes, and I saw in them his history. When I had had my bath, we proceeded at once to the little farm, where we regaled ourselves with milk which was not watered, and eggs which were not stale.

“Worth a dozen London breakfasts of adulterations,” said Vernon, as we paid the reckoning.

Crossing the valley of Griesdale, we passed the lead mine of Glen Rhydding. We had not gone far when, suddenly stopping me, Charles Vernon said, “Be my guest, old friend,” as he wrung my hand and a cloud passed over his face, whilst a sign of his habitual sarcasm was evidenced in his words; “If my humours are not irksome, you are welcome enough to the shelter of the cynic’s roof. Ah, cynic! know me as such. It is time you should. It is the verdict of the world—the world against Charles Vernon; the lie needs not to beg for backers. To-morrow I must leave you, only for a day or two; my sister’s grave may want this hand to weed it.”

There was some sarcasm here, but there was much sadness.

I looked at the face that was once so fair, and I saw too that Charles Vernon looked at me, and that look, how full of quiet melancholy! I had never seen its

parallel in wretchedness before. And there was a wild stare in the full eyes, and a quiver in the lips of the Disowned.

I turned to him, and laying my hand upon the folded arms of the strange man, I said, "Charles it must not be—we cannot, cannot part."

And as I said this so warmly, the friendless man smiled sadly.

"Something," I continued, "*here*, something in my heart seems drawing us again together. Believe me the world, that may judge you a cynic, has judged me the same—I should be tedious, or I might tell you why. Does not the world bow to your geography when you say it is—*round*? does it not challenge your anatomy, and say 'silence this cynic, he does not flatter my constitution,' when you say it is—*hollow*?"

"Who taught you thus to speak?" said Charles Vernon, wildly; "you so young—riches in your grasp, blood in your kin, and compliments in your following. Forget me. God knows, I would not have another wretched, racked as I. With society beware a quarrel. See a warning in the wreck of him who stands before you now! Ah! and something loved me once, something fair and spotless—pure; something that the world could not spoil; but *she*, she is dead and cold now. And," he said this in a whisper—"No, no, you know not *what* I am; you know not *what* you ask. Friends! *I* love again; yes, something loved me once, but she is dead and cold now. Friends! thank God if you have *one*. Forget the misanthrope, of warped and poisoned

mind, who loves that glorious world his God has made, as from his soul he hates that whitewashed charnel which society has fashioned." And that wild look seemed wilder still, as the speaker now was buried in the past.

"Ah! Sybil, Sybil! you placed your pure and simple virgin trust upon a titled loathsome thing, who promised love a—holy love—whilst thinking only how in his perjured heart he could deceive you."

Charles Vernon turned to me, and said almost authoritatively, "*I will lead the way.*"

And I followed that strange guide in his winding rapid path near the steep side of that lake which was so still. And he broke into a fearful laugh, for the spasm was upon him. He had dared to *think*, to challenge *thought*, and, looking wildly into my face, he cried, as he felt the scorching pang, "My head, my head!"

And he raised his eyes, which had become heavy and dull now, and he looked with a long, eager stare, and seeming agony, into the sky which was so bright above him. And his thoughts wandered back from space, perhaps to the home he remembered still, and which he yet might see through the long and lengthening vista of the past; or perhaps to that spot which his hands must weed, where the wind sighed low over a sister's grave. And the lips of the Disowned moved, and he looked changed and stranger still, but what he thought or said, that changed, strange man, I cannot tell. "It's on fire!" he cried, "it burns! oh! God, oh! God, it burns!"

as, tearing from his head its light straw covering with mighty force, he pressed his hand upon his brain, for Charles Vernon felt the flame which early griefs had lighted, which time had fanned, and which burned there still.

“ Sybil, Sybil, my own sweet Sybil ! ” said he, as his features now began to lose their wildness, and his face looked calm, “ you fell ! society—the tribunal to which the last appeal of fashion lies—would say you fell dishonoured, because your virgin heart had never taught you to believe appearances were false, or what suspicion meant. You fell—you, Sybil—because you trusted.” And as he led the way—now silently, for we neither spoke—where was the breaking heart of the “ broken man ? ”—the man who was old whilst yet he was young ! Did he think as he trod the mountain side of the heritage of *thought* that he had reaped, or of the grass which grew on Sybil’s grave ? Perhaps he did, for I heard him breathe her name. And the “ world ” called that man, the “ world ” called Charles Vernon a misanthrope ! and the “ world,” as well thou knowest reader, *never errs !*

Oh youth ! youth ! there is a fervid and a strange conviction in thy first and fresh sincerity—thy firm belief in noble things which glimmers brightly, as with longing eyes thou graspest at a “ future,” and as with thy buoyant step and thy elastic tread thou hurriest onward to the maelstrom ! Its roar is music to thy ear—it is no roar to thee—but, oh youth ! thou art in the dread suction that is restless

and eternal. It draws thee on, nearer and nearer, but thou knowest it not. Oh youth! youth! how the first fresh glimmer pales as in the eddy of the vortex thou art borne on the smooth surface—calmly—to convention!

What agony, of earth's full complement, is like the harsh, the terrible decree, that tears from us *all hope*, and, pointing to the world—cold, and how bleak beyond—bids us henceforth live alone? And Charles Vernon *once felt this*, when he heard the sod fall in his sister's grave. There was no pomp, no epitaph, no stone—no “complimentary mourning.” The dust of the cynic's sister was saved from that. Oblivion is the dishonoured's *grave*. Sybil had “*fallen!*” That society which had “deceived,” “knew” her no more; but Sybil's avenger lived. Her memory was Charles's trust, and it was very “sacred” to him.

But the world made up its mind. The “unexceptionable” were unanimous, and called him a “misanthrope!” Condemned at that assize, where lay his appeal? I speak the truth when writing there was none.

CHAPTER XI.

I FOLLOWED Charles Vernon to his little home. He had moved from Coniston, and was now at Ullswater; and there he, who still would *write*, carried on his restless toil. I saw that the end was nearing fast—that that genial pen would soon be still. I saw this, as at midnight the thinker sat at his heavy work—as at break of day he sat there too. I saw this—but the world would not. We were together for two or days, and during my stay I was enabled to do him an essential service. From the spasms that now so often struck upon his brain, I felt it was not right for him to be alone, and I spoke to him seriously on the subject one day. His reply I shall never forget:—“I have not long to live, not long; *she* came to my bed last night!”—and here he grasped my hand, looking long and steadfastly upon my face, whilst his lips quivered, and his words were but an incoherent whisper—“It was Sybil—the Sybil that the world killed—and not in her grave clothes. No! but Sybil as she was; and she asked me why I did not come; and when I would have answered, she

was gone—I was alone still.” And then, as evening came on, when he asked me if I thought that he would see her in his sleep again that night, I saw in that fixed stare that the tired mind was going fast. Remembering the beggar boy who had accosted me on Westminster Bridge, I determined—at my own expense—that he should serve my friend. I was fortunately able to secure his services, and I left Charles Vernon in his little home engaged by Christopher North. The father’s curse was still delayed—he still *wrote* on—he did not starve.

* * * * *

These “Trials” near their end. Circumstances had taken me abroad, and it was upwards of four years before I found it possible to return to England. During that interval I had frequently written to Charles Vernon, but as no answer ever came, I long had thought him dead. On reaching London, I lost no time preparatory to going north. It was a lovely June day when the Reach of Ullswater, in all its glory, lay again before me. The little cottage stood there still. An old friend was at the door—Pauper, the dog—the only thing the disinherited believed in on the fair face of God’s earth; and in a minute my hand was in the grasp of Pauper’s master. I have seen the change disease can make, but I never saw in man so ghastly or so terrible a wreck before—and his pen was in his hand when my foot was on the threshold, for Charles Vernon *wrote* still. His fingers had wasted nearly to the bone; it was almost more than he could do to stand. But the eagle eye!—there

was no dimness there. The change was more than this—he was thirty-two, and quite grey. My resolve was taken in a moment. I determined never whilst he lived to leave him. By his own act his end was hastened in a few weeks. Tired with my long journey, I was about to retire early. Observing my intention, he rose quickly from his chair, and staggered towards me. With his finger on my arm, he said in a whisper, whilst his whole soul seemed committed to the words, “*She’s near me now; come, she sleeps close by.*” It was so; and in a few words he told me all. Since I had last seen him he had obtained permission from his father to have the body of his sister removed to the churchyard near to which he lived, and in a few minutes I stood beside his sister’s grave. The full moonlight fell upon the stone, and I read these meaning words:—

SYBIL.

SHE DIED BECAUSE SHE TRUSTED.

That scene stands out before me now—the brother, as he kneeled; the prayer so mighty; and the words so wild. I motioned him to come away, and as he joined me I heard him murmur, “Yes—yes, I have still a little while to stay.”

Days, weeks rolled by; and he lived on. It was near the end of that hot July, when returning home one morning to breakfast after a long walk, I missed him. The appointed hour for that meal, at which we always met, had long since passed. I became at last uneasy; when, suddenly remembering how many hours of the twenty-four he

passed in that churchyard, I hastened there. I walked up to Sybil's grave, and on the dewy grass, upon his face, he lay before me. I knelt to raise him up; with a savage yell he bounded to his feet. Our eyes met; he did not know me; and there was that in the expression of his face which I had never seen in man before. He laid his hand upon my arm, and shook it with expiring strength. "Back, stranger, back," he said, "you keep me from my sister. Sybil lies here. I go to her." And, saying which, he hurled me from him, and, falling on his face, tore turf and sod from off the grave. Again I stooped to raise him, for, so fearful was the spasm on him then, I feared the bursting of some vital vessel. In a moment he had gained his feet. "God! you would take her from me," were words he rather yelled than spoke, and his hand was on my throat, whilst I was as but nothing in his tightening grip. I struggled, but his strength was terrible. The maniac forced me to the earth, whilst his eyes glared on me like a beast's of prey. His nails were in my flesh—I bear the scars to this day; but it was the dying strength of the disinherited on earth. A stream of blood that almost choked him followed his relaxing hold, and at my feet there senseless soon he laid. I could do nothing now—the hæmorrhage increased apace—but there was yet to be a little time when the dying man should know me. He opened his eyes, and full upon my face fell his last bright smile. "Friend"—for he still called me that—"Friend, where am I?" I told him his

head was pillowed on his sister's grave, and he seemed well pleased. He beckoned, and he whispered in my ear:—"My will is in my desk, friend; I leave it to your care." That little effort was too much, and again he wandered. "Give me my pen—I would *write, write!* Ha! ha! I have not starved!" So near eternity, and yet he *wrote!* Charles Vernon opened his eyes, and I could see, from his lips, that he prayed. He did. He placed his hand in mine, and I caught and registered those pardoning words:—"Oh, God! *how* I forgive them!" And so he died.

* * * * *

By his will Charles Vernon left all that he had to me. It was not much—it hardly paid his funeral; but the MSS. that were too "high-toned" are mine and my heirs' for ever. Pauper is with me still; and the Disowned's epitaph—I found it in his will. Before I left I saw that graven on his grave. It was "Heart-break"—nothing more.

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